



FOTA

The Friends of Theosophical Archives

Newsletter n° 1

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ABOUT FOTA

FOTA (The Friends of Theosophical Archives) is a charitable organisation being formed to promote knowledge of, and support for, the Theosophical archives across the world. For this purpose, "Theosophy" is defined in the same way as in the editorial pages of Theosophical History, and is not restricted to any one tradition or country. (For more information visit this link: <http://www.hypatia.gr/fota/>)

NEWS

ENGLISH FOTA AGREES CONSTITUTION

by Leslie Price

The group planning the launch of the national Friends of Theosophical Archives for England agreed the text of a constitution at a meeting in London on 24 February. The text will now be sent to the Charity Commission, a government body, for approval and registration. The charity will have to comply with various legal requirements, but will enjoy privileges that will help with fundraising. Kevin Tingay, a lecturer at Bath Spa University will chair the new body until its first annual general meeting, and Leslie Price (Associate editor, Theosophical History) will serve as secretary. The new body will be publicly announced at the Cambridge conference "Visions of Enchantment" in March 2014.

<http://www.visionsofenchancement.com/>

It is hoped that similar national bodies will be formed in various jurisdictions under the international umbrella of the parent FOTA.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THEOSOPHICAL HISTORY CALL FOR PAPERS

An international conference on Theosophical history will be held at 50 Gloucester Place, London W1U 8EA on Saturday and Sunday, 20-21 September 2014. The chair of the conference is Professor James Santucci, editor of the quarterly peer-reviewed journal "Theosophical History" (www.theohistory.org). Any person may submit a paper to the Programme Committee on any aspect of the subject, including the relationship between Theosophy and the arts. Summaries of not more than 200 words should be sent by 8 May 2014 to the associate

editor, Mr Leslie Price at leslie.price@blueyonder.co.uk. Conference participants will be responsible for their own travel, meals and accommodation but those presenting papers will be exempt from registration fees.



Visions of Enchantment Occultism, Spirituality & Visual Culture

An International Conference at the University of Cambridge,
17-18 March 2014

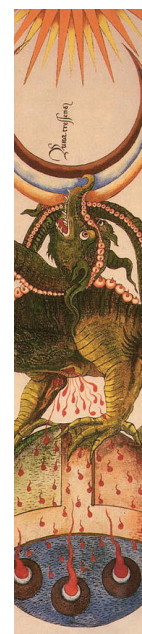
This two-day conference is a collaboration between the Department of History of Art, University of Cambridge and the Arts University Bournemouth and is organised in association with the European Society for

the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE). It seeks to investigate the formative role that occultism and spirituality have played in the creation of both Western and non-Western visual and material cultures. The conference aims to provide a stimulating platform for the presentation of innovative research in this field as well as to encourage dialogue and exchange between academics with a specific research interest in art and occultism.

Keynote Speakers:

Professor Antoine Faivre (Sorbonne)
Professor M. E. Warlick (University of Denver)
Professor Emilie Savage-Smith (University of Oxford)
Dr Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam)
Dr Sarah Victoria Turner (University of York)

For more information, please visit:
<http://www.visionsofenchancement.com/>



Alexandria West Library and Special Collections

by Jerry Hejka-Ekins

Overview

The Alexandria West Library and Special Collections serves as a resource for *Alexandria West*, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the study and promotion of Universal Perennialism: the view that the world's religions share universal truths. The library's central focus encompasses the preservation of materials germane to the modern Theosophical Movement, a perennialist philosophical movement, founded in New York in 1875. The library seeks to include works expounding on the Movement's philosophical ideas; documents concerning its various factions and syncretic developments; as well as documents concerning its sources and foreshadowing in Spiritualism, Swedenborgism, Transcendentalism, etc. The library also strives to include all other theosophies or perennialist efforts, both past and present.

The library and special collections' primary users are the associates of Alexandria West as well as researchers engaged in graduate or post graduate studies or in research aimed to contribute to our understanding of Universal Perennialism from a historical or philosophical

perspective.

We estimate the holdings to be about 15,000 volumes of published books; 564 unique periodical and newspaper titles in complete and partial runs; about 2,000 titles of pamphlets.

Mission

To preserve and provide access to primary research materials in their original formats, including books, periodicals, manuscripts, original documents, photos, recordings and other items of historical and philosophical significance in order to support educational and research activities germane to Universal Perennialism.

The Library Collections

1. The General Library Collection of Theosophical Books, Journals and Pamphlets. The Focus is upon original editions of Theosophical books and publications dating from 1875 as well as revised editions when they are of special historical significance. For instance the first editions and numerous subsequent editions of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Document* are preserved here.

2. The General Library Collection other than Theosophical Books and Periodicals.

The focus is upon preserving original editions of the source works mentioned in Blavatsky's writings; the source writings of the world's religions; mythologies; schools of Eastern and Western philosophy; ancient sciences; Spiritualism (with a focus upon the period from 1850-1875); as well as all perennialist literature and their associated journals from all other perennialist organizations independent of the Theosophical organizations.



Manuscripts and Archives

1. The Point Loma Library and Archives.

The Point Loma library and Archives was destroyed in the 2007 San Diego fire. However, Alexandria West had previously arranged to copy about 95% of the unpublished documents in the collection and selectively made copies of very rare published magazines and pamphlets. The scope of materials focuses on the Point Loma Theosophical Community from 1897-through about 1951, with additional material pertaining to Boris de Zirkoff's research in connection to his compilation of the *Blavatsky Collected Writings*. Also included are the papers of Henry T. Edge; various papers pertaining to the Point Loma Theosophical Community's operation; documentation and correspondence concerning the various factions that arose in the community after G. de Purucker's death in 1942. Est: about 50,000 pages of documents.

2. The Victor A. Endersby Collection. Includes original correspondence with follow students of Theosophy dating from 1920 to 1984. Also the original mss. for his book, *Hall of Magic Mirrors*; various notebooks, mss. for articles published in his journal, *Theosophical Notes* and records from the Berkeley Lodge, U.L.T. As Mr Endersby was an early networker among the various Theosophical groups, his correspondence with other members and lea-

ders is of significant historical interest. The collection also includes notes and reports concerning his work as an engineer. Est: 50,000 pages of documents.

3. The F. Pierce Spinks Collection. Unpublished documents include Mr. Spinks' extensive correspondence with his subscribers to *Theosophists Re-unite* and other correspondence dating from 1941 to 1979. Est: 3,000 pages of documents.

4. The Geoffrey A. Barborka Collection. Includes Mr Barborka's correspondence dating from 1940 to about 1982. Also, mss to books and articles, study notes and lesson plans for classes he had led. Est. 10,000 pages of documents.

5. Theosophical Personae Collection. A general collection of unpublished letters mss and other documents associated with prominent Theosophical leaders in various Theosophical organizations. The collection includes files of 105 individuals who were relevant to or influential in the various Theosophical Organizations including H.P. Blavatsky, H.S. Olcott, W.Q. Judge, Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater. There are no original, unpublished Blavatsky letters in this collection.

6. The Theosophical Organizations Collection. A general collection of historically significant documents and records produced by the various Theosophical organizations and their branches; and well as other groups historically relevant to the Theosophical Movement. Thus the collection includes ancillary organizations such as the Order of the Star in the East and the Knights of the Round Table.

Jerry Hejka-Ekins has been networking with the various Theosophical Organizations since 1963. He is the Founder of Alexandria West, a not-for-profit educational organization dedicated to promoting the teachings of and preserving works on the Perennial Philosophy. Contact him at: books@alexandriawest.org



Archives at the Theosophical Society in America

by Janet Kerschner

The Archives Department of the Theosophical Society in America is located in the headquarters campus in Wheaton, Illinois. The department is closely affiliated with the Henry S. Olcott Memorial Library, and the Library's beautiful reading room serves not only its own patrons but researchers who wish to work with archives. Archival storage spaces and the Rare Books Room are open only to staff members, as is common practice in archival repositories and research libraries, so that we can monitor environmental conditions and keep collections secure. Staff members are very glad to page requested materials to the reading room for patrons. Making our materials accessible comes second only to ensuring their continued existence.

Our **policies and procedures** are like those of small academic archives, following best practices for arranging, describing, and preserving our collections. We maintain provenance and original order while trying to make the collections as accessible as possible. Those efforts are balanced with other responsibilities: to produce displays, articles, and lectures; to work with donors and researchers; to seek grants and other special funding; and to support staff projects.

Researchers typically contact us in advance to determine whether we have materials that will be useful for their purposes. Academics, Society members, and the general public approach us with a huge range of questions. Often it is possible for us to handle requests entirely by e-mail, but researchers are welcome to visit in person. Accommodations can be arranged in guest rooms for a fee, or sometimes on a "work-exchange" basis, with free room and board provided for voluntary service. Photocopiers, scanners, and free wireless Internet service are available for visitors.

Institutional archives comprise a large por-

tion of archival holdings. We have papers of our Presidents beginning in 1895 with Alexander Fullerton. Those records are somewhat sparse in the early years, but much more complete since 1920. We have records of our conventions, educational activities, membership, public programs, construction blueprints, donations of art, and many aspects of our daily operations over the decades. The National Secretary's files of dissolved lodges are extensive, and some of those defunct local groups donated their own records. Inactive records of several departments are regularly transferred to the Archives Department.

Our Archives also has special collections (manuscripts collections), of which the most significant is the **Boris de Zirkoff Papers**. It consists of the extensive correspondence, manuscripts, research notes, photographs, and microfilm required to prepare H. P. Blavatsky's *Collected Writings*. A future article will cover this rich resource.

Records of the Cincinnati Theosophical Society are another collection that will interest many historians. This was the first American branch formed, in the home of Dr. J. D. Buck, where the American Section was also formally constituted later the same year of 1886. Two books of detailed minutes cover the crucial period of 1886-1896 when the Theosophical Society was becoming established in the United States and undergoing the turmoil of its schism in 1895. William Quan Judge, Annie Besant, and G. N. Chakravarti visited Cincinnati in 1893 while traveling toward Chicago for the Parliament of the World's Religions, and their remarks were reported in great detail. All three signed the minutes. Three volumes record the proceedings of a Secret Doctrine class that the group held for almost fourteen years. There are also forty-two letters addressed to Dr. and Mrs. Buck by many prominent members during the period of 1878-1900.

The **Kunz Family Collection** documents the activities of Fritz Kunz as he traveled with C. W. Leadbeater in 1905-1906 and worked in early Krotona in 1913. He served as principal of Ananda College in Sri Lanka, 1914-1917 and assisted Annie Besant for several years. Then he had a career as a lecturer and teacher; formed the Foundation for Integrative Education; and edited *Main Currents in Modern Thought*. A small portion of this collection relates to Dora van Gelder Kunz: her lectures and Therapeutic Touch workshops. Over 400 audio-tape recordings, eight films, numerous photographs and slides, art works, and manuscripts fill 35 boxes.

Albums of photographs and clippings are among our treasures. Three belonged to Clara Codd. Two lovely volumes are photographs of Geoffrey Hodson; another was a gift to Sidney Cook from the staff. A postcard album is filled with cards sent to Carl E. Holbrook by C. W. Leadbeater.

Digitization projects are a high priority, but are driven by the condition of materials; the needs of staff, members, and researchers; and the availability of equipment, volunteers, and specialty vendors. Descriptive metadata must be provided for the digital products, and that can be very time-consuming. In our holdings there are thousands of photographs and slides; microfilmed membership records; audiovisual and digital media; and, of course, papers, that all have different requirements to be made usable in electronic formats. Albums of photographs and clippings are too fragile to be scanned on a flatbed; a planetary (orbital)

scanner is needed to capture images from above with the book gently held in a cradle. Emails and other born-digital records are increasingly problematic to preserve.

Our presence on the World Wide Web will be expanding this year. The Archives web page will have much more information about collections and policies after a major redesign takes place. We plan to add online displays representing some special collections.

Our Internet encyclopedia, the **TS Wiki**, at www.tswiki.net, has had over a million page views. Dr. Pablo Sender has made it into a major information source for Theosophical concepts, and we are continually expanding coverage of the Theosophical movement – the events, people, places, organizations, books, art, periodicals, and research tools. As we run across interesting and unknown bits of information in our Archives Department, we add scans and references into related wiki articles so that the wealth in our collections will be available to the world. We invite other archivists, historians, and students of Theosophy to join our efforts.

At the Theosophical Society in America, we are excited to see the formation of the Friends of Theosophical Archives. There is much work to be done!

Janet Kerschner has been working in the TSA Archives for eight years. Several of her articles have appeared in *Quest* magazine and in *Theosophy Forward*. She is active in the Academy of Certified Archivists, the Society of American Archivists, and other professional organizations. Contact her at archives@theosophical.org or 630-668-1571 extension 353.



New Blavatsky Photograph?

by John Patrick Deveney

Marc Demarest has reported in his blog on a photograph for sale on eBay that the seller suspected might be of H.P. Blavatsky (1).

I'm increasingly inclined to think the seller's guess was right and that this Mystery Photograph was of HPB.

The pros and cons. The eyes I think are certainly like HPB's — light-colored and penetrating. The hair of the subject, unlike HPB's in most of her surviving photographs, is not curly and wispy, however, and seems drawn back and straight, but there are other photographs of her of the time that show the hair styled in a somewhat similar fashion. The eyebrows, nose and mouth do differ, as Erica Georgiades has pointed out to me, from the standard photographs. The subject of the photograph, additionally, is wearing earrings, though in the usual photographs of HPB the earrings seem to be smaller, buttons or studs. The costume is unlike any we hear of HPB affecting, but it



could easily be one of props a photographer would have lying around his studio, like the equally outrageous outfit HPB chose for the familiar series of photographs she had taken at Beardsley's studio in Ithaca, New York, while visiting the Corsons in late 1875. On the other hand, the "desert" theme of the costume may be HPB's way of one upping Lydia Pashkoff, whom she had known in Syria in 1872 and who was visiting New York in early 1878—and who in 1877 had published a picture of herself in similar Bedouin garb while in the Levant (2). Was HPB trying to announce to the world that she, too, had traveled the world?

What chiefly militates against a facile decision that the photograph is that its subject is so fat. Through the wonders of Photoshop this can be moderated, producing a representation that is closer to the HPB we know, but perhaps still not compelling (3):



All the surviving photographs of Blavatsky after her early 30s — which may survive precisely because they are more flattering—show that she had a matronly figure, but none shows her as heavy as the subject of the eBay photograph. Nevertheless, she seems to have been enormously heavy for a short period from the finishing of *Isis Unveiled* until her departure for India. Olcott says:

"While she was writing *Isis Unveiled*, at

New York, she would not leave her apartment for six months at a stretch. From early morning until very late at night she would sit at her table working. It was not an uncommon thing for her to be seventeen hours out of the twenty-four at her writing. Her only exercise was to go to the dining-room or bath-room and back again to her table. As she was then a large eater, the fat accumulated in great masses on her body: her chin doubled and trebled; a watery fat formed in her limbs and hung in masses over her ankles; her arms developed great bags of adipose, which she often showed visitors and laughed at as a great joke—a bitter one as it proved in after years. When *Isis* was finished and we began to see ahead the certainty of our departure, she went one day with my sister and got herself weighed: she turned the scales at 245 pounds (17 stone 7), and then announced that

she meant to reduce herself to the proper weight for travelling, which she fixed at 156 pounds (11 stone 2). Her method was simple: every day, ten minutes after each meal, she had a wine-glass of plain water brought her; she would hold one palm over it, look at it mesmerically, and then drink it off. I forget just how many weeks she continued this treatment, but finally she asked my sister to go again with her to be weighed.

They brought and showed me the certificate of the shopkeeper who owned the scales, to the effect that 'The weight of Madame Blavatsky this day is 156 pounds!' So she continued until long after we reached India, when the obesity reappeared and persisted, aggravated with dropsy, until her death" (4).

What clinches the matter for me is that the photograph was made in the Sarony studio in Union Square. HPB had lived near Union

Square in her early years in New York and may have known the studio then, but she certainly knew it later—and had photographs of herself made there at least once. W.Q. Judge offered for sale in *The Path* (for 50 cents) copies of a photograph of HPB that was taken in 1876 by Sarony and had only recently come to light.⁵ Which picture this was is unknown, but there is a variety of photographs of HPB done by Sarony. Here is one, also from eBay.



If this is from 1876, the little tiara-like head piece allows to identify the date and provenance of several other, better-known photographs of HPB.

HPB was still distributing copies of this series of photographs as late as 1878 — when, by Olcott's story, her appearance had changed markedly with her gain in weight. In March 1878 *The Phrenological Journal* published a profile of HPB (with phrenological notes by James Ro-



des Buchanan) (6) and illustrated the article with a drawing of HPB.

Under the drawing, the author of the article added: "For the admirable photograph from



which our portrait was engraved we are indebted to M. Sarony, of Broadway."

The Mystery Photograph cannot come from this series of pictures — HPB had not yet gotten so fat — but it could easily represent a photo session with Sarony in late 1877 or early 1878, a series of pictures that HPB may well have kept to herself and not distributed because of its unflattering depiction of her physical appearance after writing *Isis*.

I vote for the Mystery Photograph as a picture of Mme. Blavatsky.

NOTES:

(1) "With and Without Brimstone: Charles Partridge, Match King," online at <http://ehbritten.blogspot.com/search?q=blavatsky+photograph>.

(2) Mme. Lydie Paschkoff, "Voyage à Pal-myre. 1872—Texts et Dessins Inédits," *Le Tour du Monde* 33 (1877): 161-176. On HPB and Paschkoff, see Deveney "Who Knew H.P.B. When?—Lydia Paschkoff," *Theosophical History*.

(3) Erica Georgiades, who first attempted the transformation of the Mystery Photograph, has noted that the subject's left nostril is blurred, either by motion or a double exposure.

(4) H.S. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), 489-490. I am grateful to Michael Gomes for jogging my memory about where this story appeared. In a letter to Mme. Jelihovsky written about this time she said: "I have suddenly caught a glimpse of one of the most disgusting scenes of my own life, and I felt as if I was

out of my body, looking at it with repulsion whilst it was walking, talking, getting puffed up with fat and sinning. Pheugh, how I hated myself!" "Letters of H.P. Blavatsky," *Path* (December 1894): 265-270. Similarly, in a self-deprecating letter to Colonel John C. Bundy of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in January 1878, she made fun of her fat appearance and her "Calmuck" nose. *Carrier Dove* (November 1891), 298.

(5) "Notices," *Path* (October 1891): 232.

(6) "Madame Blavatsky," *Phrenological Journal* (March 1878): 134-137.

John Patrick Deveney is an associate editor of Theosophical History.



New Photograph of Blavatsky: Real or *Faux*?

by Erica Georgiades



Last year, Marc Demarest contacted me to ask my opinion whether a picture for sell on eBay was from HPB or not. I replied to him stating my opinion that, the picture was faux.

After examining an enlarged version of the picture, and contrasting it with the ones of HPB I noticed the following:

1 – The eyebrows of HPB are not arched. The lady in the picture has arched eyebrows.

2 – HPB's lower lateral surface of the external nose is fat. This is not the case with the lady in the picture.

3 – HPB's lips do not have lower inclination at the edges. The lips of the lady in the picture have lower inclination at the edge.

4 – HPB's hair was curly. The lady in the picture has no curly hair.

5 – The shape of their face do not match.

6 – There is a resemblance in the eyes.

7 – The nose has three nostrils.

The lady in the eBay picture has three nostrils. Someone could consider that this was the result of a camera motion, or could indicate the picture was edited in Photoshop. If the camera moved then all photo would be blurry. In case of Photoshop editing, probably the individual selling the picture made a bad editing and blurred the nostrils. If this is the case only a digital forensic analysis of the picture could solve the problem.

Photoshop offers many tools to forge pictures, including possibilities to change eyes. In this vein, the resemblance in the eyes could be the result of copying and pasting HPB's eyes over the picture of another woman, and the use

of the tools the software provides to blend the eyes with the face of the individual in that picture.

Additionally there are other elements in the picture, as I already pointed out, which for me indicate that the person in the picture is not HPB.

Nonetheless, Patrick Deveney may be right, and the picture in question could be really an unknown and new picture of HPB. However, considering all the factors mentioned here, my vote is that the picture is *faux*.

Erica Georgiades is the chief editor of the Hellenic magazine 'Hypatia'



FOTA TIMELINE

May, 2013 – Leslie Price proposes the formation of FOTA

<http://www.hypatia.gr/fota/index.php/articles/77-friends-of-theosophical-archives-a-proposal-by-leslie-price>

June, 2013 – Leslie Price announces first steps to organize FOTA

<http://www.hypatia.gr/fota/index.php/articles/76-friends-of-theosophical-archives-update-1-leslie-price>

August 2013 – Erica Georgiades designs a web-site for FOTA, and an informal steering committee is managing FOTA: Leslie Price, John Patrick Deveney, Marc Demarest and Erica Georgiades.

September 2013 – Janet Lee (secretary of the Theosophical Society in UK) announces the FOTA initiative during the conference 'Enchanted Maternities: Theosophy and Arts in the Modern World'

<http://www.york.ac.uk/history-of-art/amsterdam-theosophy-conference/synopsis.htm>

October 2013 – First issue of FOTA Newsletter is scheduled for 2014.

November 2013 – A meeting was held at 50 Gloucester Place on 5 November 2013 of persons interested in setting up in that country The Friends of Theosophical Archives. (A similar initiative is planned for USA). Present were Lynda Harris Janet Lee, Leslie Price, and Kevin Tingay.

<http://www.hypatia.gr/fota/index.php/articles>

February 2014 – Leslie Price announces that English FOTA agrees constitution. Kevin Tingay, a lecturer at Bath Spa University will chair the new body until its first annual general meeting, and Leslie Price (Associate editor, Theosophical History) will serve as secretary. The new body will be publicly announced at the Cambridge conference "Visions of Enchantment" in March 2014.

<http://www.hypatia.gr/fota/index.php/articles>

March 2014 – Circulates the first issue of FOTA Newsletter.

You Can Help

If you wish to participate in the formation committee, contribute to the archival preservation fund, or identify an archive in need of preservation, contact Leslie Price: leslie.price@blueyonder.co.uk

If you wish to join FOTA's mailing list, subscribe to our newsletter by clicking here:

<http://www.hypatia.gr/fota/index.php/news>

