

CHARLES ANTHONY GOESSMANN
BOOK COLLECTION



Goessmann in his Syracuse Laboratory circa 1864

by

David L. Adams

Chemistry Department

University of Massachusetts Amherst, MA 01003

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Background and Introduction

Charles Anthony Goessmann was the first professor of chemistry at the Massachusetts Agricultural College (MAC) in Amherst. He started in 1869, retired in 1907, and died in 1910 (1). On June 19, 1911, the MAC Trustees voted to purchase Goessmann's book collection (2) for \$500 plus some undetermined future amount (3) for the collection of 600 books and "several hundred" pamphlets (4). This book collection is significant because of who collected it and when it was assembled.

Goessmann, a Friedrich Wöhler trained Ph.D., was a pioneer in agricultural chemistry in the United States. He perfected the methods used to produce pure sugar and dairy salt in this country, established the sugar beet as an efficient source of sugar, and wrote the first state fertilizer law in the nation (5). He was both Vice-President (1877, 1881 & 1882) and President (1887) of the American Chemical Society (ACS) (6). The purpose of this paper is to describe the results of the search for the materials in the Goessmann collection at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass). The inspiration for this research was a conversation I had with Herb Pratt at the ACS meeting in New Orleans in August 1999. I had presented a brief history of the UMass, chemistry department [formerly MAC (1863-1933) and Massachusetts State College (1933-1947)] in a symposium I organized on academic chemistry departments. In that presentation I mentioned the Goessmann book collection as part of a description of the library located in the new Goessmann Laboratory that was built at MAC in 1924. Herb inquired if I would be willing to look into the collection further for a possible future symposium on antiquarian chemistry book collections. I did and this paper is the result. In order to put this collection and the search for it in perspective, however, it is useful to provide a brief biography of Professor Goessmann.

Charles Anthony Goessmann – Brief Biography

Karl Anton Goessmann was born in Naumberg, Germany in 1827. He became an apothecary in 1846 and, through the urging of Friedrich Wöhler, a good friend of Goessmann's father, decided to pursue advanced work in organic chemistry.



Goessmann in 1875

Goessmann received the Ph.D. under Wöhler at Göttingen in December 1852 and afterward served as his first assistant. In 1857 he took a three-year leave of absence to tour Europe and America to study agricultural operations. While in America, he was persuaded by his former students E. P. and J. H. Eastwick, to assist at their sugar refinery in Philadelphia. He left there in 1862 to work on salt purification at the Onondaga Salt Works in Syracuse, N.Y. While there he taught chemistry part-time at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (7).

Meanwhile, about 300 miles away, one of his former classmates at Göttingen and also a Wöhler Ph.D., William S. Clark, was named president of the newly formed Massachusetts Agricultural College (MAC) in Amherst. In 1868 Clark convinced Goessmann to become the first professor of chemistry at MAC, a position he began in January 1869. In addition to developing and teaching in the chemistry program at MAC, Goessmann was also the first Director of the Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES) (8).

Acquisition of the Goessmann Book Collection by MAC

Professor Goessmann retired in 1907 at the time of this 80th birthday and died on September 10, 1910 at his home in Amherst. During his years at MAC Goessmann amassed a sizeable collection of chemistry, pharmacy, agriculture, and various other science books. In June 1911 the college agreed to purchase his collection for \$500.00 and some future sums. The actual amount of the future payments, if any were made, is unknown.

In a December 13, 1911 report to the College President, Charles R. Green, the college librarian, acknowledged the library's receipt of the collection and described it as consisting of "600 volumes and several hundred pamphlets." The same report indicated that the books were to be catalogued as soon as the Goessmann Collection bookplates were affixed to them. Later in that same report the librarian states regarding the cataloguing process then underway at the library: "at this rate...several years will have elapsed before the final work of the cataloguing will be accomplished. (9)" A year later, the annual library report dated December 10, 1912 stated that it was "impossible to make those volumes especially available for use..." The librarian further stated: "It is my intention to plate and stamp the Goessmann books soon and place them in the original

book cases now temporarily arranged in the Zoological Museum. After this collection has been properly catalogued it should be an important addition to the Department library of the new Chemistry building.” (10) Beyond those few pieces of information about the acquisition of the collection, nothing else has surfaced in official UMass library documents about the fate of the Goessmann books.

Search for the Goessmann Books

It was in this context of scant information that a search was begun to ascertain the status and location(s) of the Goessmann books at UMass Amherst. A search of the library accession logs from the relevant era provided little information. Further, the accession logs from the most key dates, 1913-1920, are unavailable, presumably lost. In the logs from 1910-1912 fewer than 10 books were logged as originating from Goessmann, in all likelihood these were separate and apart from the 600 volume book collection.

Next, an electronic search of the UMass library catalog for all books in several Library of Congress categories published prior to 1910 was made. Working from this list generated by the catalog search, those books that (a) Goessmann personally signed, (b) were originally inscribed as a gift to him, or (c) contained a bookplate designating it as belonging to the Goessmann collection, were identified. It appears that three (3) different bookplates were used over the years to identify books belonging to the Goessmann collection. Chronologically, the first bookplate contains the phrases “Karl Anton Goessmann Collection” and “Massachusetts Agricultural College” printed as part of the bookplate, and is found in nine (9) of the volumes that exist today. The second bookplate is a plain UMass nameplate (not identifying the W. E. B. Du Bois library), and is found in two (2) volumes. The third is the W.E.B. DuBois plate from post-1972 and it is found in twenty-six (26) of the books. Somehow these twenty-six books were identified as belonging to that Goessmann collection in the early 1970s. No one contacted on the campus today recalled how these books were thus identified. Another eight (8) volumes with no bookplate are identified as belonging to the Goessmann collection by either his signature or an inscription to Goessmann from a third party.

Fate of the Goessmann Book Collection

As a result of a hand search of the entire UMass library collection guided by the results of the computer search, a total of forty-five (45) books were definitely identified as belonging to the Goessmann collection. Several others likely belonged to the collection, but this cannot be concluded unequivocally. In any event, this latter number appears to be small. What, therefore, was the fate of more than 550 books in the original Goessmann collection? It is quite unlikely that they were lost, stolen, or misplaced. The history of the UMass library and its policies do not support this possibility. There are three other distinct possibilities, with no evidence to suggest that any one is more likely than the others. One possibility is that the books were scattered among the university's many departmental libraries unrecorded and therefore unidentifiable later. A second is that they were destroyed when the chemistry laboratory building, in which they were possibly stored along with many other artifacts of the Goessmann era, was leveled by fire on October 6, 1922. It is known that the books in the chemistry library were saved in that fire (11). However, the Goessmann collection may have been stored in a different location in the chemistry building, and thus lost. A third possibility is that they remained in the Zoological Museum. In 1910 Fernald Hall was built on the MAC campus as the home of entomology and zoology. The building contained a Zoological Museum on its south side that occupied all three floors (12). Are the books still there? To date none of the Goessmann books have been found in Fernald Hall or any of the other successor locations of the Zoological Museum on the UMass campus.

Specifics of the Existing Goessmann Bok Collection

The complete list of the 45 books available publicly from the original Goessmann collection is available at <http://www.chem.umass.edu/~adams>. This list contains author, title, call number, publisher, language, publication date, and comments. Of the 45 books, 30 are in German, 10 in English, and 5 in French. The publication dates of the vast majority of books range from 1840-1874. The disciplines represented by the books reflect the interests and career of Professor Goessmann. Using the Library of Congress system of classification, nineteen (19) of the books were in chemistry (QD), fifteen (15) in agriculture (S), nine (9) in pharmacy (RS), and one (a) each in plant culture (SB) and home economics (nutrition, TX).

Included in the collection are books written by 34 different authors, 13 of whom are indexed in Aaron Idhe's 1964 *The Development of Modern Chemistry*. These authors include Friedrich Wöhler, Justus von Liebig, Bernhard Tollens, A.W. Hoffman, Friedrich Mohr, Johann Dobereiner, Heinrich Rose, James F.W. Johnston, and Albrecht Thaer. Goessmann himself personally signed sixteen of the books, and the change in his signature reflects his Americanization. Especially noteworthy is one pharmacy book in which Goessmann made voluminous notes in the blank pages between printed pages found in the book for this purpose (13). Another is a volume on herbal medicines by Arnemann in which someone (Goessmann?) placed still preserved herb samples (14).

As stated earlier there are several volumes in the UMass collection that may have belonged to the Goessmann collection but this cannot be verified. Because they are of historical significance they will be mentioned here. Lavoisier's 1789 2-volume treatise, *Traité de Elémentaire Chimie* is present along with Justus von Liebig's 1847 *Application of Chemistry to Agriculture and Physiology*.

Summary

Although the vast majority of Charles Goessmann's book collection is unaccounted for, forty-five books are catalogued and available to the public. Included among these are many of significance written by well-known authors such as Friedrich Wöhler and Johann Dobereiner. Most of the Goessmann books are in the disciplines of agriculture and chemistry and written in German or English. The complete list with details is available from the author's web site (*vida infra*).

Works Cited

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