

Volapük Collection
1888-1891
Mss.408.9.Ar7v

American Philosophical Society
2002
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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Various
Title	Volapük Collection
Date [inclusive]	1888-1891
Call number	Mss.408.9.Ar7v
Extent	0.25 Linear feet
Location	LH-MV-B-4
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Created by the German priest Johann Martin Schleyer in 1879, Volapük ("World's Speech") was the first artificial language to gain wide spread popularity as a prospective form of universal communication. During the 1880s, Volapük clubs were formed throughout Europe and the Americas, with a particularly active center in eastern Massachusetts, however it was gradually replaced by its somewhat less elaborate rival, Esperanto. The Volapük Collection includes printed materials, ephemera, and small number of letters and postcards written in Volapük. Assembled by F. L. Hutchins of Worcester, Mass., a leading American Volapükist, the collection reflects the brief, but intense international interest in the potential of Volapük to become a lingua franca of business and a medium for exchange across borders, and it conveys some of the excitement its adherents felt at its potential.</p>

Preferred Citation

Cite as: Volapük Collection, American Philosophical Society.

Background note

Although the concept of an artificial international language predates the eighteenth century, it was not until the late nineteenth century that it hit its stride. The rise of nationalisms (and antinationalisms) made the period a particularly fruitful one for universal languages, beginning with the appearance of Volapük ("World's Speech") in 1879, followed by Esperanto (1887), and Ido, or improved Esperanto (1907). All three have retained devotees into the present.

The first planned language to gain any degree of success, Volapük was the brain child of Johann Martin Schleyer (1831-1912), a Catholic priest from southern Germany who claimed to have received divine inspiration to improve international communication. Benefitting from a heavily systematized grammar, a rigorously consistency, and a clear method of word formation, Volapük aimed for ease of pronunciation and spelling, monosignificance of words (each word having only one meaning), and clarity in syntax and gender. At the same time, Schleyer made every effort to capture the richness and nuance of a natural language. His efforts, to say the least, struck a chord. During the 1880s, Volapük was wildly successful at attracting adherents drawn to the utopian dream of universal communication, with estimates of over 100,000 adherents at its peak of popularity. The language was spread through the formation of Volapük clubs, which sprang up throughout Europe and the Americas, and three International Congresses were held during the 1880s to promulgate the language, the first in Germany in 1884, followed by others in 1887 and 1889.

The decline of Volapük, however, was not long in coming. After the congress of 1889, Schleyer's vehement resistance to any alteration in his original conception eroded support, and the language began a slow decline relative to the upstart Esperanto. The problems with Volapük can be traced largely to internal causes, not only Schleyer's intransigence, but the complexity of verb forms, which featured a vast number of different endings to connoting subtle shades of meaning, its overly complex grammar, and its arbitrary choice of roots that made Volapük a chore for Europeans and Americans to learn. In the years following Schleyer's death in 1912, Volapük went into near total eclipse, enjoying only a brief revival in the Netherlands in the 1930s and, until the Nazis suppressed it, in Germany, as well. Arie de Jong's revision of 1931 (Volapük pebevoböl) made some significant improvements to Schleyer's idiosyncratic system, including in verb structures, tense, and grammar, however Volapük pebevoböl never regained the popularity of its parent. By the 1960s, only a handful of speakers remained, and these mostly Esperantists seeking little more than a point of linguistic comparison.

Scope & content

The Volapük Collection consists of approximately 0.25 linear feet of printed circular letters, newspapers, pamphlets, and ephemera, with a few hand-written postcards and letters, all relating to the first flowering of Volapük during the late 1880s and early 1890s. The collection reflects the brief, but intense international interest in the potential of Volapük to become a lingua franca of business and a medium for exchange across borders, and conveys some of the excitement its adherents felt at its potential.

The Volapük Collection appears to have been gathered largely by the American Volapükist, F. L. Hutchins of Worcester, Mass., probably for an informational exhibit on the language. Hutchins was involved both in his local Volapük club (the Volapükaklub de Worcester) and in the national Volapükaklub Nolumelopik (North American Association for the Propagation of Volapük), and the collection provides a slight, but balanced view of his internationalist aims. In addition to letters from European Volapükists, Hutchins displayed a letter in Volapük from China, and newspapers, promotional and informational circulars and publications in Volapük published by American Volapük advocates from Massachusetts to Portland, Oregon. Among the more interesting materials are a set of announcements for the First Annual Convention of American Volapükists and two circular letters (folder 33) describing the progress of Volapük in North America. Although most of these periodicals are represented by only a single issue, the geographic breadth of coverage is intriguing.

The collection has been retained in the order in which it was received, despite its somewhat chaotic nature. Several folders contain what appear to be exhibit labels (the text of which is transcribed in the descriptive notes below). Except as noted, all of the materials in the collection are printed or lithographic copies, intended for mass circulation.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 2002

Provenance

Acquisition Information

Acquired from M&S, June 1973 (accession number 1973-1167ms).

Processing Information

Recatalogued by rsc, 2002.

Alternative Form Available

The collection is completely microfilmed, Film 1319.

Related Materials

Related Material

Volapük Centre, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, *Catalog of Contents*, comp. by Brian R. Bishop (Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, 1981). **Call no.:** 400 Pam., no.56

Separated Material

A broadside was removed from the collection to the Printed Materials Department:

Volapükaklub in Leitmeritz läsevom atoso söli Hutchins F. L. (Lietmeritz, 1891). **Call no.:** 973 C683, no.723

Indexing Terms

Corporate Name(s)

- North American Association for the Propagation of Volapük
- Volapükaklub de Worcester
- Volapükaklub Nolumelopik

Genre(s)

- Broadsides.
- Circular letters
- Postcards

Personal Name(s)

- Creelman, G. C.
- Hutchins, F. L.
- Schleyer, Johann Martin, 1831-1912
- Sprague, Charles E., (Charles Ezra), 1842-1912

Subject(s)

- Languages, Artificial
- Volapük

Collection Inventory

Volapük Exhibit	1889-1891	33 folders	Box 1
Exhibit card	n.d.	1 item	Folder 1
World-Speech Volapük	n.d.	1 item	Folder 1
"Merits adoption, Melidom lensumi": Reasons to learn Volapük			
Sprague, Charles E., (Charles Ezra), 1842-1912 <i>Hand-book of Volapük</i> (N.Y.: Office Co., 1888)	1888	2 items: 2p. and 8p. pamphlet	Folder 2
Specimen pages			
Price list of Volapük Publications	n.d.	4p.	Folder 2
Addenda to Wood's Dictionary of Volapük	n.d.	1p.	Folder 2
Specimen pages			
<i>Schleyer'a literat Volapük</i> (Konstanz: C. Okle, n.d.)	n.d.	4p.	Folder 2
Labob stimi nunön oli atoso dö funam Danotabura Volapükik tedelik	1889	3p.	Folder 3
"Circular describing a bureau designed to advise as to standing of any commercial house in the world conducted through and by means of Volapük and Volapükans," Milan, Italy			
Association Polytechnique de Charenton et Saint-Maurice ...Programme des Cours	1889-1890	1p. circular	Folder 3

Volapük Exhibit

"Circular showing Volapük as study in Polytechnique Association of Charenton, a suburb of Paris, Franch."

Mehmke, R. Nüns Gletavik (Fovot 2id)	1889	1p.	Folder 4
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"Mathematics translated into Volapük for use in University of Darmstadt, Germany"

Kittel, Hans Sül palestimöl e paflen!	1889	2p. lithograph circular	Folder 4
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"Circular from Volapük Club in Leipzig"

Volapükaklub Nolumelopik (North American Association for the Propagation of Volapük)	1889-1890	1 folder	Folder 5
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Constitution	ca.1890	2p.	Folder 5
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List of members	1889	4p.	Folder 5
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First Annual Convention of American Volapükists... Boston, Mass.	August 21, 22, 23, 1890	4p.	Folder 5
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Announcement of Convention

You are cordially invited to attend the Public Session of the First Annual Convention of the N.A.A.P.V.	1889	2p. invitation	Folder 5
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Admit bearer and friends to the Volapük exhibit	1890	1p. ticket	Folder 5
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[Invitation to dinner]	[1890]	1p.	Folder 5
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Constitution	1889	2p.	Folder 5
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Volapükaklub Nolumelopik	July 21, 1890	1p.	Folder 5
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Announcement of First Annual Convention of North American Volapükists.

Volapük Exhibit

Danelson, James Edwin Circular letter concerning organizing a Volapük club in New York	August 5, 1890	1p.	Folder 6
World-Speech Volapük	n.d.	1 item	Folder 6
"Merits adoption, Melidom lensumi": Reasons to learn Volapük. See also same item in folder 1:2.			
Volapükaklub Flentänik I. Lovepolam in pük netik	1886	3p.	Folder 7
"Circular of French Volapük Club concerning the issuing of Diplomas"			
Post, Alfred A. (North American Association for Propagation of Volapük) Circular letter	189-	1p., 2 copies	Folder 8
Includes list of "Volapük Text-Books" on verso.			
Post, Alfred A. The need of a comprehensive dictionary of Volapük for English students...	ca.1890	1p.	Folder 9
Circular letter.			
Sprague, Charles E., (Charles Ezra), 1842-1912 Dictionary of Volapük...	ca.1890	1p.	Folder 9
Advertising flier for M. W. Wood's Dictionary.			
Hutchins, F. L. Telegram to A. A. Post	February 1891	1p.	Folder 9
"Volapük telegram in use of which 7 words were saved"			
Hughes, W. J. Li kapälol Volapüki? Works on Volapük	n.d.	1p.	Folder 10
Litho. price list.			

Volapük Exhibit

<i>Volapükabled Däna</i>	1889	8p.	Folder 10
Danish Volapük-language periodical.			
Hughes, W. J. Volapük	n.d.	1p.	Folder 10
Notification of magazine, <i>Volapük</i>			
Soprague, Charles E. Volapük	ca.1890	1p. postcard	Folder 10
Information on the language			
Beale, Charles C. Volapük Headquarters...	ca.1890	1p. postcard	Folder 10
Notice of receipt of subscription for magazine <i>Volapük</i> .			
Post, Alfred A. The need of a comprehensive dictionary of Volapük for English students...	ca.1890	1p.	Folder 10
Circular letter.			
Huebsch, Samuel. Volapük, A Guide for Learning the Universal Language	August 15, 1889	1p. postcard	Folder 10
Notification of availability of two works on Volapük.			
What is Volapük?	ca.1887	2p.	Folder 11
Avantages et utilité du Volapük	n.d.	2p.	Folder 11
In French.			
Zeitungs-Auszüge	n.d.	2p.	Folder 11
Extracts from newspapers on Volapük, in German.			

Volapük Exhibit

Wéltspràchelíteratúr In German.	n.d.	2p.	Folder 11
Zirkular Nr. 285 In German.	n.d.	2p.	Folder 11
Nogan Volapükik "Organ of Volapük for Belgium and Holland published in Antwerp."	1889-1890	16p.	Folder 12
Van Kuo T'ung Hua Tzu Tien "Chinese Volapük Paper published in Amoy, China."	n.d.	13p.	Folder 12
Volapükabled Däna Prospectus(?), "Volapük Gazette, Organ for Denmark and Scandinavians published at Copenhagen."	1889	4p.	Folder 13
Auszug aus dem zweiten Blatte des "Essener 1881 Zeitung"... Volapük In German.		2p.	Folder 14
Volapükaklub de Gent Card	n.d.	1p.	Folder 14
Miscellaneous envelopes Miscellaneous envelopes from European Voluapuk clubs.	1890-1891	5 items	Folder 14
[Item not included] "Paper published in Milano, Italy"			Folder 15
The Bouquet Article on Volapük in popular magazine.	January 1, 1891	2p.	Folder 16
Beale's Volapük Leaflets, no. 5	n.d.	8p.	Folder 16
Schwäbische Weltsprachezeitung	1880	8p.	Folder 17

Volapük Exhibit

Number 1. "Paper published in Allmendinger, Wurttemberg."			
Volanunel	1890	8p.	Folder 17
Number 3. "Paper published at Prague, Bohemia."			
Volapükan	1890	8p.	Folder 18
Number 25. Paper published in Munich, Germany			
Pakamabled Nedänik	n.d.	6p.	Folder 18
Number 2. Paper published in s'Heerenhoek, Netherlands.			
Volapük correspondence	1890	5 ALsS	Folder 19
Miscellaneous manuscript letters written in Volapük from Alfons de Cock (Belgium); R. Mehmke (Darmstadt, Germany); Winsum (Breda, Germany); A. Hullebrouck (Antwerp, Belgium); illeg. (Amoy, China)			
World-Speech Volapük	n.d.	1 item	Folder 19
"Merits adoption, Melidom lensumi": Reasons to learn Volapük. Same as folder 1:2.			
Cogabled	1888	8p.	Folder 20
Number 24, "Comic paper published in Munich, Bavaria."			
Veizapot	1891	4p.	Folder 20
Number 5; Volapük newspaper from Zurich, Switzerland.			
Cuyper, B. de [Invitation]	May 22, 1891	1p.	Folder 21
In French, "Invitation to a musicale and to lecture concerning Volapük by Prof. J. de Hoon, Gent, Germany."			
Gased Bevünetik	1890	16p.	Folder 22
Vol. 1, no. 5, "Published in St. Louis, Mo., USA".			

Volapük Exhibit

Schleyer, Johann Martin, 1831-1912 Kurze Vergleichende Grammatik der Weltsprache (Glamat Blefik Feleigöl volapüka) (Konstanz: von Schleyers, 1887) "Volapük Grammars".	1887	12p.	Folder 22
Volapük. (Universal language) Pronunciation sheet and grammatical information	1887	4p.	Folder 22
Starck, H. Auszug aus dem Welstracheblatte nr. 51...	n.d.	2p.	Folder 23
Emilie, Paul Liebe Freunde und Sprachkunstgenossen!	n.d.	1p.	Folder 23
Volapükan Melopik Vol. 1, no. 21 and 22; "American Volapükist published in Portland, Oregon"	1891	6p.	Folder 24
Volapükabled Tälük Vol. 2, no. 13; "Italian Volapük Paper, published in Torino, Italy"	1889	8p.	Folder 24
Extract from the Speech about Volapük: Advantages and usefulness of the world- language	n.d.	2p.	Folder 25
Vorzüge Nutzen und Vorteile der Weltsprache / Bizugs ä pöfüds Volapüka Phrases in German (and Volapük equivalents) extolling the virtues of Volapük	1890	2p.	Folder 25
Sezüks se Bükots Snippets praising Volapük, in Volapük.	n.d.	2p.	Folder 25
Volapükabled Zenodik No. 109; "Father Schleyer's own paper, 1st number of the 10th year"	1890	4p.	Folder 26

Volapük Exhibit

Miscellaneous postcards	1889-1891	8 postcards	Folder 27
Postcards, in Volapük, addressed to F. L. Hutchins and others			
Miscellaneous envelopes	ca.1890	8 items	Folder 28
Miscellaneous postcards	1889-1891	8 postcards	Folder 29
Postcards, in Volapük, addressed to F. L. Hutchins and others			
Souvenir of Lecture on Volapük at Trinity Church, Worcester, Mass.	April 13, 1891	4p.	Folder 29
Brief poem in English and facing Volapük.			
Calling cards	n.d.	5 items	Folder 29
Miscellaneous envelopes	n.d.	8 items	Folder 30
Envelopes from European Volapükists.			
Miscellaneous postcards	1890-1891	8 postcards	Folder 31
Postcards from European Volapükists, in Volapük, including one from Paul Champ Rigot.			
Miscellaneous letters in Volapük	1889-1891	5 ALsS	Folder 32
Manuscript letters, in Volapük, addressed to F. L. Hutchins, including one from Paul Champ Rigot.			
Zeitungs- und Brief-Auszüge über Volapük	n.d.	2p.	Folder 32
In German.			
Söl e läd Lewis E. DeWolfe	1890	1p. AMs	Folder 33
Manuscript poem.			
Creelman, G. C. Volapükaklub de Worcester	n.d.	1p.	Folder 33
In facing Volapük and English; circular letter soliciting membership			
Hutchins, F. L.	1891		Folder 33

Volapük Exhibit

Volapük Lifomöz

Sept. 19, 1891

1p. (2 copies) Folder 33

In English; mimeo(?) copies addressed to members of the Volapükaklub Nolümelopik apprising them of progress in Volapük efforts.

Circular of information concerning
Volapük

July 13, 1891

1p. (2 copies) Folder 33

In English and facing Volapük; litho. copy to members of the Worcester Volapük Club et al., providing international news on Volapük.
