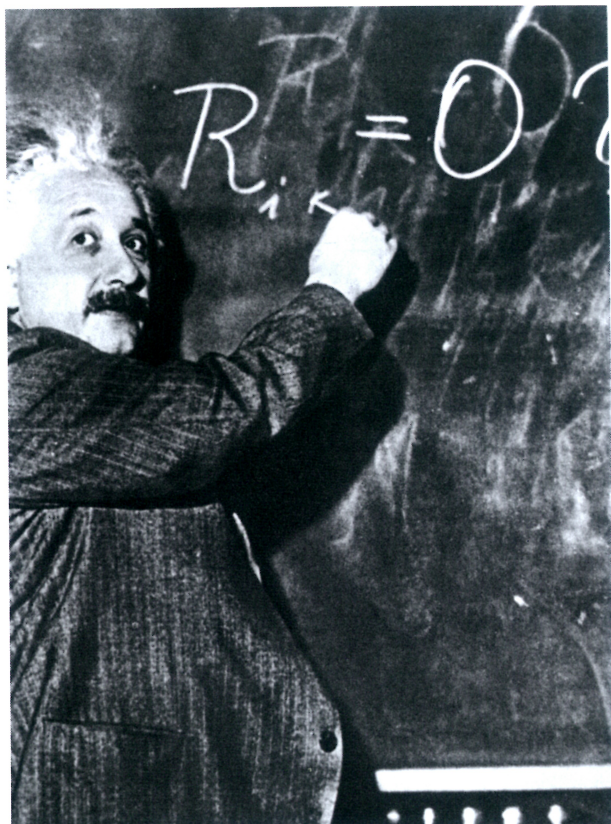


## The Einstein Papers Project 1955–2005

The publication of the *Collected Papers of Albert Einstein* has been a long-standing editorial project. So far, nine volumes of Einstein's collected writings and correspondence have been published since 1987 (with one double volume), covering Einstein's life and work from 1879 to 1921.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955) lived in Germany, Switzerland, and eventually the United States, through six major epochs of modern history: the



Albert Einstein at the blackboard with a formula about the Milky Way, Pasadena 1931

Wilhelmine Empire, World War I, the Weimar Republic, Fascism, World War II, and the post-war period. He had been the prime mover of the transformation of modern physics, starting with the publication of his revolutionary papers on the photoelectric effect and on the special theory of relativity in what we call “the miraculous year 1905,” and became the most important scientist after Isaac Newton. Einstein never wished for a memorial, and insisted that his ashes be scattered

at an undisclosed location. The Einstein Papers Project is our intellectual memorial to his life and work.

Although its first volume appeared more than thirty years after Einstein's death in Princeton, N.J., in 1955, plans for such an edition were initiated early. In his last will and testament, Einstein bequeathed his entire literary estate, with no stipulations or strings attached, to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, an institution which he helped establish and on whose behalf he had begun working as early as 1919. Upon his death, the task of organizing his written legacy was entrusted to the executors of his literary estate, his long-time assistant Miss Helen Dukas and his friend Otto Nathan, an economist living in New York. Both, Dukas and Nathan, decided that a publication plan should be initiated with dispatch, yet the process ultimately turned out to be arduous and at times painful. Not only did various complications arise in the process of collecting material, but also Einstein's various family branches disagreed with the executors regarding the status of physical and intellectual ownership to material which was variously held in private hands, libraries and archives, as well as in Einstein's former home and office.

Other aspects of the envisioned project needed to be clarified and implemented, such as the possible location, funding sources, editorial policies, and management. Eventually, in the early 1980s, John Stachel, professor of physics at Boston University, officially began the work of planning for what was already a highly challenging enterprise. By that time, Helen Dukas and Otto Nathan, with assistance and advice from a number of historians of science, had organized Einstein's manuscripts and letters at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where Einstein had worked since 1933. Dukas and Nathan corresponded with hundreds of individuals, institutions, libraries, former friends, colleagues, and family members over a

period of three decades. By the mid 1980s, they had collected more than 40,000 items, either in the original or in photocopy, from the U.S. and Europe, and had established an impressive card-catalogue which Dukas had typed up. Between 1979 and 1981, with assistance from Princeton University staff, the catalogue was entered into a computerized database. The materials themselves



were photographed on microfilm, several hard-copies were produced, while the original Einstein Archive, as it was known by then, was crated and shipped to the newly established Albert Einstein Archives at the Jewish National & University Library at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where it has resided ever since. Helen Dukas died shortly thereafter, having devoted almost six decades to Einstein and his legacy. A biography of this remarkable woman is still to be written! The editorial project was established at Boston

University, in a building housing nearby the Faculty of Philosophy. Princeton University Press, whose director Herb Bailey had been an early and enthusiastic supporter of the project, took on the responsibility of publishing the large format bound books, as well as a paperback companion translation project. The editors decided that all of Einstein's scientific writings, both published and unpublished, as well as drafts, notebooks, scientific and personal correspondence would appear in chronological order. Unpublished materials would be faithfully transcribed, no silent corrections of typographical or other errors would be applied, and punctuation and style would be reproduced, while errors of fact or calculation would be explained in the annotation. Published items would appear in facsimile, while comparisons to drafts or versions would be examined and detailed in the footnotes. An Introduction and various Editorial Headnotes analyzed major themes in Einstein's life and work. It was to be a project that combined the most rigorous American and European editorial standards, whereby historical events, places and names, as well as scientific developments would form the core of the detailed scientific-historical annotation.

The first volume of Einstein's papers was the most challenging to produce. Little material documenting his childhood and youth was extant, and, most distressingly, manuscripts of his early work, among them one of his most remarkable papers on the special theory of relativity, published in 1905, when Einstein was only twenty-six years old, were not available. Nevertheless, the editors embarked on an ultimately highly successful hunt for unknown letters and documents, so that by 1987 the deeply personal and revealing letters between Albert Einstein and his classmate, sweetheart, and first wife Mileva Marić could be included in a volume that also contained copies of his school certificates, his final leaving examinations, his university notebooks, and other highly illumi-

Otto Nathan in conversation with Albert Einstein  
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nating and never before examined materials. This achievement of the first editorial team at Boston University, consisting of John Stachel as senior editor, together with David Cassidy (now at Hofstra

physical, mathematical, and conceptual foundations of modern physics, included Martin J. Klein (Yale), A. J. Kox (now at the University of Amsterdam), Michel Janssen (now at the University of Minnesota), and many other associated and contributing editors, graduate students and editorial staff. Ein-stein scholarship has benefited immensely from new insights gained over the past eighteen years. With almost every volume, new biographies for the general public are published, and our received view of Einstein deepens and changes. The four first volumes covering Ein-stein's writings were followed by the first volume devoted exclusively to correspondence. Since then, the published volumes have been divided into a *Writings* series and a *Correspondence* series, a division that was dictated by the rising number of letters after 1915. Thus Volume 5 covered Einstein's correspondence from 1902 to 1914, a significant time period, while the latest Volume 9, published in 2004, only covers a period of sixteen months.

This dramatic increase in Einstein's correspondence was due in large part to his rising fame shortly after the end of World War I, his many additional administrative responsibilities, his status as Germany's pre-eminent scientist, and his gradual engagement in social, political, and humanitarian causes. It was in the spring of 1919, only several months after the end of the war, the dissolution of the German empire, and before the Versailles Treaty had even been concluded, that two British astronomical expeditions set sail for the north-eastern coast of Brazil and the northwestern coast of Africa to observe a solar eclipse on May 29. The expedition's major goal was to test one of the three fundamental observational predictions of the theory of general relativity, namely, that light from distant stars will be deflected when it passes the strong gravitational field in the vicinity of the sun. The official report on the results of the expeditions was published in England in the fall. As a

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1930.

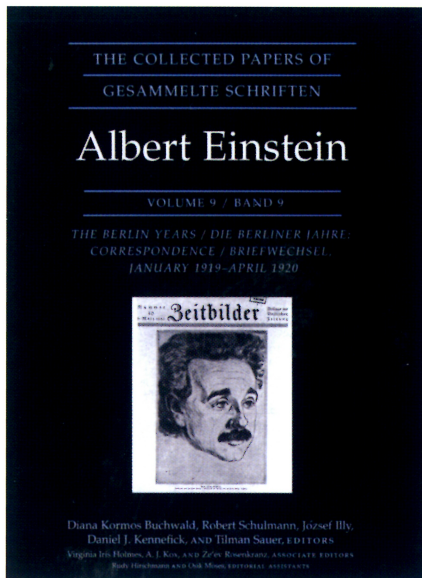
Abreise Bahnhof Zoo. Photographen, Reporter, Michèle mit Mutter, Kätzelstein, Frau Stampf, Else, Margot, Rudi und Tina waren da. Ich steige ins Abteil, Else fehlt. Der Zug fährt ab. Schlafabteil mit viel Gepäck. Else erscheint aufgeregt und zornig. Billets fehlen - es zeigt sich, dass sie der Schaffner schon hat. Aufregung legt sich allmählich. Man schläft bald. Um vier Uhr muss Fenster geöffnet werden.  
8 Uhr Ankunft in Köln. Erfolg -

A. Einstein Archive  
24-134

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Journal of the American trip in 1930/31. Shown here is the first page, with Einstein's entry about the departure from Berlin, Zoologischer Garten station, 30 November 1930

University), Robert Schulmann (now residing in Bethesda), and Jürgen Renn (now at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin), was followed by a series of important analyses of Einstein's scientific development. Among them are the volumes documenting his most revolutionary scientific contributions between 1905 and 1916, included in Volumes 2-4, and most significantly, Einstein's strenuous path towards his greatest achievement, the general theory of relativity. Over the years, the editorial team, consisting of historians and philosophers of science whose specialty was the complex

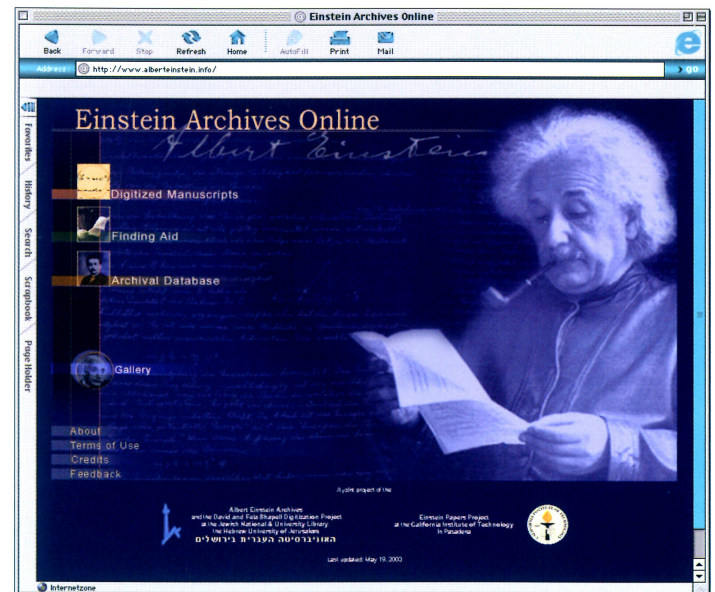


Jacket of volume 9 of the *Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, published in late 2004

consequence, Einstein, who had eagerly awaited the results of the expedition, became known world-wide. Besieged by reporters, Einstein started appearing on the covers of popular magazines and newspapers. He became a celebrity in Berlin and elsewhere, was asked for popular renditions of his most recent work, and invited to lecture not only at home but also abroad. As the only German prominent scientist identified with an opposition to World War I and among the few German intellectuals who had not signed the *Manifesto of the 93* that had defended German's war aims, Einstein thus became a spokesman for international reconciliation among scientists and intellectuals and increasingly a public figure rather than a private savant.

The project moved in the summer of 2000 from Boston to the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena when I was appointed the new general editor. Einstein had been a visiting scientist at Caltech during three winter terms in 1931, 1932, and 1933. He had come here to engage with the astronomers and physicists who, during the late 1920s and early 1930s, were making some of the most revolutionary advances in our understanding of the structure of the universe. He met extensively with Edwin Hubble, who had shown that, contrary to Einstein's initial assumptions, we live in a dynamical and expanding universe of a much larger scale than Einstein had known when he developed his theory of generalized relativity in the first two decades of the century. The project, now housed in its own rather charming villa on the

campus of Caltech, consists of a staff of about five full-time equivalent editors with varying areas of expertise and experience on the project (Jozsef Illy, Daniel Kennefick, Tilman Sauer, Virginia Iris Holmes, A. J. Kox, Ze'ev Rosenkranz and Jeroen van Dongen), supplemented by gifted undergraduate students, an editorial and technical staff, visitors, and a number of researchers in Europe, the US, and Israel who contribute material from local libraries and archives. Over the past two years, our infrastructure has changed significantly, especially in that we have moved to a web-based database consisting of more than 60,000 items (or more than half a million photocopied pages in our collection). We work from copies, in close cooperation in particular with the Albert Einstein Archives in Jerusalem, with whom we have launched, in a highly intense and successful collaboration, a new



website containing high-quality images of 900 digitized scientific and non-scientific manuscripts in Einstein's hand, as well as a finding aid and database. The website, launched in May 2003 on the occasion of a symposium celebrating twenty-five years of editorial work on the *Collected Papers*, held at the Museum of Natural History in

Homepage of the Online Albert Einstein Archives' website, launched in 2003

New York on the occasion of its Einstein exhibition, was accessed during its first few weeks by several hundred thousand users. ([www.alberteinstein.info](http://www.alberteinstein.info)) The challenges of selectivity are one of the most significant current editorial challenges. While Einstein's writings for the period 1922-1925 would probably fit into no more than one volume of Writings, his complete correspondence of incoming and outgoing letters for the same period would probably necessitate several Correspondence Volumes. A decision was thus made to Calendar administrative items pertaining to Einstein's activities as member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences and as director of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute of Physics, a calendar which

reached eighty pages in Volume 9. We are now publishing approximately 50% of his correspondence and are debating ways of reducing the number even further without prejudicing certain aspects of Einstein's work and life, presenting a fair representation of the broad incoming correspondence from publishers, students, colleagues, and public figures without imposing the historian's judgment too severely onto extant material.

What emerges however is that over the next few volumes much new, unexplored material will continue to come to light, providing an ever expanding and deepening understanding of Einstein's life and work.