

ANTON T. BOISEN IN PUERTO RICO IN 1902? INTRODUCING A NEW FINDING

By

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An Introduction to the Documentary Evidence

An unknown development regarding the pre-ministerial years of Anton T. Boisen was briefly presented to the membership of the Society for Pastoral Theology, during the June 2007 meeting in San Juan Puerto Rico. Now, the documents are exhibited in this webpage, for the first time.

The central documental evidence pointing to Boisen's interest coming to Puerto Rico is comprised of two letters dated February 1902. Both letters represent fragments of a seemingly substantial correspondence between, Indiana University President, Joseph Swain and Samuel M. Lindsay, Commissioner of Education of the Department of Education of Porto Rico.² The original documents are located at the Office of University Archives and Records Management, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Associate Archivist, Dina M. Kellams, compiled and facilitated copies of the original documents for this research in September 2006. The documents are located primarily in the president's correspondence files. Other important documents are, located in these files, such as:

1. A number of letters from *The Council for the Clinical Training of Theological Students* dating the mid 30's. These are letters from Boisen to IU President William Lowe Bryan written on Council for the Clinical Training of Theological Students letterhead. They can be found in the Anton Boisen file within President William Lowe Bryan's records, Collection C286.32.
2. Copies of various known published articles and papers, such as: "The Psychiatric Approach to the Study of Religion" *Religious Education*, (March, 1928) : 2-15; "Theological Education Via the Clinic," *Religious Education*, March, (1928) : 2-8 and, "Schizophrenia and Religious Experience," *Elgin State Hospital: Collected and Contributed Papers*, Vol. I, (1932) : 5-15.
3. A paper Boisen entitled "Fidelity and Vision" from 1933. Collection C286.32.

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² The term "Porto Rico" was used after the American invasion of 1898 to facilitate for the Americans the pronunciation of the more classical name of the country; which is "Puerto Rico," in contrast with the more ancient and more difficult pronunciation of the country; which is "Boriquén."

4. A report Boisen entitled: "*An adventure in Theological Education and Pastoral Service: A Statement of the Aim and Accomplishments of The Council for the Clinical Training of Theological Students in the Chicago Area. Prepared for and Submitted to the Ball Foundation,*" May 1937. Collection C286.32.
5. A copy of a worship service entitled: "*A Christmas Service,*" from Elgin State Hospital, dated December 22, 1932. Collection C286.32.
6. Two additional letters, one in which Boisen writes to the University of Indiana in the spring of 1903, notifying them of his resignation to pursue other interests. (ATB to the Trustees and President WLB, 24 March 1903, Collection C270.16). The next letter was then 1907, and he was working as a forester by that point. (ATB to WLB, 21 June 1907, Collection C270.16.)
7. Other miscellaneous documents, which include a few letter's belonging to Boisen's personal correspondence. Collection C203.

Importance of the Letters

A preliminary research of established sources containing biographical references about Boisen did not include any information acknowledging the existence of the letters. Also, they make no reference connecting Boisen to Puerto Rico.

The documents offer a window into Anton T Boisen's early years and promise much hard work in offering a coherent interpretation. Simply put, providing meaning to the documents will be difficult because Boisen's own autobiography (*Out of the Depths*)³ makes no mention of the newly found documents nor he provides any direct indication of his personal interest to come to Puerto Rico. Yet, the two letters connecting Boisen to Puerto Rico and thus; to have a better portrait of the Boisen we have come to know, it seems important for future researchers to make sense of the documents.

At this point, research continues in Puerto Rico in an attempt to find the correspondence Boisen sent to Commissioner Lindsay. However, the hopes of finding the documents are limited. In 1928, "San Felipe II," a category 5 hurricane devastated the Island and let behind losses estimated in 50 million dollars and killed 300. Later in 1932, "San Ciprian" a category 4 hurricane further destroyed was the previous hurricane left standing; the damages were estimated in 40 million, 257 died and 4820 were wounded. This last hurricane destroyed many historical buildings, including the structure that held the General Archives of Puerto Rico (established the 8th of December in 1955 under the Law of Public Administration Documents); which of course are the resting place of Boisen' correspondence. Amid the above, a few preliminary conclusions can be made about the documents:

³Anton T. Boisen, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960).

- In spite of the fact the Boisen's autobiographical narrative makes no reference to the letter, it is clear that two documents connect Boisen to Puerto Rico.
- It seems clear that Boisen had a personal interest in coming to Puerto Rico, as a schoolteacher. The fact that Commissioner Lindsay explains that he holds a letter from Boisen in his records proves this point.
- The new documental evidence belongs to significant periods in Boisen's life. The date and the time-period of the documents are significant because they represent a period in which Boisen made "major decisions" and suffered "deviation from the normal" experience.
- The documents time-period have also political significance. They fit within the period of *American Expansionisms* and the *Foreing Missionary Impulse* promoted by the ideology of the *Manifest Destiny*. To this end, the documents are a window into Boisen's political persona during this period.
- The new documental evidence is incomplete and it's clear that it belongs to a significant group of correspondence between Commissioner's Lindsay's and Indiana University President Swain.
- Finally, it is a historical fact that Boisen had an interest to come to Puerto Rico in 1902. Historians of Boisen should take this fact into account.

**Transcription of Copy of Original Letter from
Commissioner Lindsay to Indiana University President Swain⁴**

Bloomington, Indiana,
15 February, 1902

Mr. Samuel M. Lindsay,
Commissioner of Education,
San Juan, Porto Rico.

My dear Sir:

Mr. Anton Boisen, who is instructor here in Romance Languages, is anxious to go to Porto Rico to teach. He is very well prepared to teach French and English and has studied also German, Spanish and Italian. The field in Porto Rico is attractive to him because of the opportunity it offers to further pursue the study of Spanish. Should he go he would desire to be located in some place where the opportunity to learn the Spanish language would be good.

Mr. Boisen is an excellent young man in every way a very successful teacher. He has good health and a good spirit. If you have a place for such a man you would make no mistake in appointing him. He was graduated from Indiana University with the class of 1897. Since his graduation he has been first, tutor and later instructor in Romance languages in his institution.

Yours very truly,

[signed Joseph Swain]

President

⁴ The file is located at: Swain to Lindsay, Accession 0581.2, Office of University Archives and Records Management, Indiana University, Bloomington. Dina M. Kellams, Associate Archivist at the Office of University Archives and Records Management, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, transcribed the letter, from its original being that the document is too fragile for scanning.

**Electronic Copy of the Original Letter from
Commissioner Lindsay to Indiana University President Swain⁵**

Department of Education of Porto Rico.
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER,
SAN JUAN.

February 28th, 1902.

6662 A

President Joseph Swain,
Indiana University,
Bloomington, Ind.

Dear Sir:-

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of February 15th recommending Mr. Anton Boisen for a position to teach in the schools of Porto Rico. I have a letter from him in the same mail, and also other recommendations concerning his work.

I am very much obliged for your kind letter calling my attention to Mr. Boisen, and I will look into his qualifications and see that his name is considered in connection with the first vacancies in our schools.

Yours very truly,

Samuel M. Lindsay
Commissioner of Education.

Z

*You can read & return to me
J.S.*

⁵ The letter is located at the Samuel M. Lindsay to Indiana University President Joseph Swain, Collection C174.5, Office of University Archives and Records Management, Indiana University, Bloomington. Dina M. Kellams scanned the letter. Note: Archivists in Puerto Rico explain that the handwritten number "666267" in the top-center, as well as the typewritten capital "Z" in the left-bottom, refer to office-codes used to classify daily correspondence at the time. The codes are no longer in existence and their use cannot be currently explained. The handwritten inscription says: "You can read and return to me," and a certain J.S initializes it.