Ahmed Zaky Abushady was a polymath in the Victorian mold, a preeminent Egyptian literary figure, bee scientist, inventor, and physician who found pathways between modes of thought and scholarship long before “interdisciplinary” became an academic catchall. Though his life’s work has received wide-ranging honors (he’s even appeared on a commemorative Egyptian postal stamp), no archive of his personal and scholarly effects exists. One is now in the works thanks to the efforts of Abushady’s granddaughter, the Brooklyn-based artist and writer Joy Garnett. The proposed archive, for which Garnett is raising funds via the online platform Hatchfund, would preserve and translate the vast collection of artifacts from his life she inherited in 2008.
Abushady on an Egyptian commemorative postage stamp issued in 1992

Born in Egypt and educated in London, Abushady had a career that spanned stints in Alexandria, Egypt, New York City, and Washington, D.C., where he passed away in 1955. Though he studied to become a physician, Abushady was, over the course of his life, a prolific inventor and founder of institutes, societies, and publications. Among his achievements in publishing alone, the literary journal Apollo (1932–34) is today regarded as a landmark of 20th-century Arab Romanticism, while Bee World, the bilingual periodical launched by the Apis Club (a scholarly beekeeping society he started) continues to be published by the International Bee Research Association. (Abushady also founded The Bee Kingdom, a “monthly review of modern bee culture” and the source of the name Garnett has given this archive project.)

“These family stories are retold, and you don’t know what to ask,” Garnett told Hyperallergic on a recent afternoon Brooklyn, speaking of the importance of creating a scholarly archive to preserve her maternal grandfather’s legacy for future generations. Abushady is a beloved figure in Egypt, a sui generis character who, in addition to his major contributions to beekeeping — he invented the removable aluminum honeycomb, among other patents, also “saw bees as a perfect metaphor for language,” Garnett said.

Encompassing the books, prints, cartoons, photographs, and correspondence Abushady amassed during his life on three continents, the project is a significant undertaking in archiving and translation. Garnett hopes to partner with an institution to host the result in “an online, open-access” platform, citing the Cornell-based Waguih Ghali archive as a model. The fundraising campaign, set to conclude on December 31, will cover the purchase of materials for archiving and the translations of documents from Arabic to English. Two lithographs, replicating an original Abushady patent and a political cartoon depicting the man himself, will also be produced by Garnett as incentives to donors.
Caricature of Abū Shādī by Fridon [Reproduced from Mukhtaṭū waḥy al-ʿAm, Cairo, 1928.]

A cartoon of Abushady selected for reproduction by Joy Garnett