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Some long lost Albert Einstein papers were unearthed last summer, including an original manuscript that set forth what scholars consider one of the physicist's greatest discoveries. The papers turned up at Leiden University in the Netherlands, where Einstein was welcomed as a visiting professor during the 1920s by his friend and fellow physicist Paul Ehrenfest.

Ehrenfest's library was bequeathed to the university in the 1980s, a half century after his death. It contained a number of important books and a messy, seemingly unimportant stash of loose-leaf papers. "I mean stacks of old brittle paper that just crumples in your hands," says physicist Carlo Beenakker. The papers remained untouched until Rowdy Boeyink, a graduate student at Utrecht University, asked to see them and was shocked when a few letters written by the physicist Niels Bohr fell out of one of the magazines.

He spent the next three weeks sorting through each and every sheet in 36 piles of paper. The best find came last. Einstein wrote five major academic papers in his lifetime. Four of those original manuscripts are known and preserved, but the fifth, "Quantum theory of the monatomic ideal gas," was thought to have vanished in the ether. Late one Friday evening in July Boeyink happened upon 16 folded pages tucked in a German magazine. The handwriting was familiar but the papers were unsigned. So Boeyink turned to the Internet. "I Googled the title and all of a sudden appeared the published version of this article."

Boeyink had found the original manuscript of Einstein's fifth and final major paper, published in 1925, in which he theorized that the supercooling of atoms would cause particles to be locked in the lowest quantum state of a system. It was 70 years before a team of physicists produced the first empirical evidence of this phenomenon, known as Bose-Einstein condensation, and earned the 2001 Nobel Prize in Physics for providing proof of Einstein's remarkable prescience.