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# Guide to the American Institute of Sacred Literature Records 1880-1943



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## Descriptive Summary

**Identifier** ICU.SPCL.AISL

**Title** American Institute of Sacred Literature. Records

**Date** 1880-1943

**Size** 13 linear feet (26 boxes)

**Repository** Special Collections Research Center  
University of Chicago Library  
1100 East 57th Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

**Abstract** The American Institute of Sacred Literature, which offered courses in the study of the Bible, was organized in 1889. The Institute grew out of the Correspondence School of Hebrew (established in 1880 by William Rainey Harper) which was renamed the American Institute of Hebrew in 1883. The AISL records contain primarily correspondence. Topics include Chautauqua summer schools, the Institute's relationship with the University of Chicago and William Rainey Harper, and the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. Also includes material on the founding of the Institute and courses taught.

## Information on Use

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: American Institute of Sacred Literature. Records, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

### Historical Note

Establishment and Purpose of the Institute-

In December of 1880, at the Morgan Park Theological Seminary, one of the first correspondence schools in the country was established by William Rainey Harper. By February 1881, the Correspondence School of Hebrew had an enrollment of three hundred students, mostly ministers and teachers, and a movement which might justly be called a revival in the study of the Old Testament in the original tongue was begun. In 1883 the school was renamed the American Institute of Hebrew; in 1889 Harper, now Professor of Hebrew and Woolsey Professor of the English Bible at Yale University, realized a need for broadening the scope of the Institute's work

and it was expanded to include Biblical Hebrew, such as Syriac, Assyrian and Arabic, the Bible in the original tongues, the Bible in the ancient versions, the Old and New Testaments in English, and Biblical literature, history and Theology.

#### Harper and the Institute-

From the founding of the Institute until the beginnings of the University of Chicago in 1892, the strong personality of Harper appears in every phase of the Institute's operation. From 1892 until his death in 1906, Harper's influence is seen less in the affairs of the Institute as he devoted himself more and more to the young University. Although the Institute maintained a constant fund raising effort, it is clear that after Harper turned most of his energy toward the University, the Institute began to suffer from a lack of money often sufficient enough to cause a slowing of its work. Beyond the money problem there were the more serious problems of the loss of Harper, with his imagination and drive, and the changing times. Reorganization and adjustment became the normal pattern of the Institute's operation as it attempted to survive after the interest which had called it into being was dead.

#### The University of Chicago and the Institute-

The relation between the Institute and the University of Chicago began as soon as the University started to function. Upon the opening of the University and the organization of the University of Chicago Press, the good will of The Old and New Testament Student (published by the Institute) was transferred to the Press and the publication of Hebraica and The Biblical World began. Upon the organization of the Correspondence Department of the University, in the same year (1892), such courses of the Institute as would lead to University credit were transferred to the Department and carried on cooperatively. In the middle of 1905 the University's Board of Trustees carried out Harper's wish to make the Institute a part of the University and it was soon firmly attached to the Divinity School. By 1924 the Institute was handling most of the Divinity School's extension work; by the early 1940s the Institute had reversed its position and was placed under the Divinity School's

Director of Extension, and by the mid-forties the Institute had ceased to function, except to fill orders for material if a stock still existed. (In Appendix II will be found a rough chronology of the Institute, some material quoted and some cited.)

#### The Administration of the Institute-

In the early years of the Institute, from 1880 to 1883, the administration rested largely in Harper's hands. However, by 1883, the Institute had grown to such an extent that a stock company was formed to conduct both the Correspondence and the Summer Schools of Hebrew,

sponsored by the Institute. The following year a division of responsibility placed the publishing feature of the Institute in the hands of the stock company and the educational work with Dr. Harper. When the American Institute of Hebrew was formed in December of 1883 the organization consisted of seventy professors of Hebrew and the Old Testament subjects in the United States and Canada, and between one and two hundred interested persons, as associate members and patrons providing financial support. In 1889, when the American Institute of Sacred Literature was organized, Harper became principal and a board of twelve directors was appointed. A President, Vice-President, Secretary, Principal, Treasurer and Auditor, together with five instructors administered the work of the reformed Institute and gave instruction to its students. In 1890 Local Boards were organized in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Kansas City and San Francisco, and under their auspices Winter Schools for Bible study of from one to twelve weeks each were held. In this year, also, publishing interests were transferred to the Student Publishing Company of Hartford, Connecticut, and the magazine *The Old Testament Student* became *The Old and New Testament Student*.

In 1891 the headquarters of the Institute moved with Harper to Chicago. The Secretary and two members of the teaching staff were brought to Chicago, and the eastern interests, chiefly financial, were left with Dr. F. K. Sanders of Yale. In 1896 the Institute was incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois. In 1905 the Institute was accepted by the University of Chicago with the agreement that the University continue the Institute "as part of the extension work of the University." At this time President Harper placed the immediate administration of the Institute under the control of an executive committee, selected from members of the Divinity School faculty, and an Executive Secretary who were responsible to the President and through him to the Board of Trustees.

Professor Ernest D. Burton, the first Chairman of the Institute's Executive Committee, remained active until his appointment as Director of the University Library. After this Miss Georgia L. Chamberlin, who had been Harper's secretary in the pre-Chicago days, and who remained with the Institute until 1935, carried on the work of the Institute from her post as Executive Secretary. Upon her retirement in 1935, Professor Archibald G. Baker was appointed Director and remained in this position until 1940. Between 1940 and 1943 the Institute was placed under a committee and then Professor Sidney E. Mead was appointed Director. After little more than a year the dying Institute ceased to function actively and was subordinated to the Divinity School's Director of Extension.

### **Scope Note**

The American Institute of Sacred Literature records consist of 13 linear feet and cover the period 1880-1943. The collection includes general correspondence files that have been arranged chronologically by year and in most cases has a rough alphabetical treatment, by writer, within the year. Where distinct groupings of correspondence could be related, this has been done, and the material filed at the end of the general correspondence for that particular year. Some of the purely historical material, early undated material and printed Hebrew lessons will be found in

the first box. At the end of the sequence more undated course material, of a later period, and a partial file of The Institute will be found.

This collection of correspondence is related to other material in the University Archives, particularly the Divinity School correspondence. Men such as Ira M. Price and Edgar J. Goodspeed, who were involved with the Institute, were often connected with the Morgan Park Theological Seminary which was to become part of the University of Chicago's Divinity School. And so information about these men and their work is in this collection. Further information relating to the Chautauqua summer schools and the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy is to be found in the correspondence over-and-above the value of the collection which as a whole provides information on the Bible study movement in the United States, and the career of President Harper.

## **Related Resources**

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

## **Subject Headings**

- Harper, William Rainey, 1856-1906
- Price, Ira Maurice, 1856-1939
- Goodspeed, Edgar J. (Edgar Johnson), 1871-1962
- American Institute of Sacred Literature
- American Institute of Hebrew
- Chautauqua Institution
- Bible -- Study and teaching -- History
- Hebrew language -- Study and teaching

## **INVENTORY**

### **Box 1**

#### **Folder 1**

Historical accounts, correspondence, meeting minutes, undated

### **Box 1**

#### **Folder 2**

Printed materials, undated

### **Box 1**

#### **Folder 3**

Printed materials, notes, undated

### **Box 1**

#### **Folder 4**

Copy of the correspondence course, undated

### **Box 1**

#### **Folder 5**

Instruction sheets, question sheets, administrative documents, undated

**Box 1**

**Folder 6**

Hebrew lessons, undated, undated

**Box 1**

**Folder 7**

The Life of Christ, undated

**Box 1**

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The Founding of the Christian Church, undated

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**Folder 1**

The Biblical World, 1906

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**Folder 2**

Printed materials, letter from WRH, 1880-1882

**Box 2**

**Folder 3**

Correspondence, printed materials, news clippings, meeting minutes, notes, 1883-1885

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Correspondence, printed materials, 1886

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Correspondence, printed materials, 1887

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Correspondence, printed materials, 1887

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Chautauqua, Correspondence, 1887

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Loisette Memory Course, correspondence, 1887

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Loisette Memory Course, Correspondence, 1887

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Correspondence, printed materials, news clippings, 1891

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Correspondence, printed materials, news clippings, notes, administrative reports, 1891

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Correspondence, printed materials, notes, 1891

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative reports, 1891

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Correspondence, 1892

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Correspondence, 1892

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**Folder 1**



Chautauqua, correspondence, 1892

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Correspondence, printed materials, meeting minutes, 1893

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Printed materials, 1893

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Blakeslee, correspondence, printed materials, 1893

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Chautauqua, correspondence, news clipping, 1893

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative reports, 1894

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Printed materials, administrative reports, 1894

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Printed materials, administrative reports, 1894

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**Folder 9**

Printed materials, meetings minutes, administrative reports, notes, 1895

**Box 7**

**Folder 1**

Printed materials, 1895

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**Folder 2**

Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1895

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**Folder 3**

Correspondence, printed materials, administrative reports, administrative documents, 1896

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**Folder 4**

Printed materials, meeting minutes, news clippings, 1896

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**Folder 5**

Council of Seventy, correspondence, printed materials, meeting minutes, administrative documents, 1896-1905 [1/2]

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Council of Seventy, correspondence, printed materials, meeting minutes, administrative documents, 1896-1905 [2/2]

**Box 8**

**Folder 1**

Correspondence, printed materials, news clippings, administrative documents, 1897

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, notes, 1897

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1898

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Correspondence, printed materials, notes, course materials, administrative reports, 1899

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Conference report, 1899

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative reports, 1900

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative reports, 1901

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Mailing records, 1901-1904

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Correspondence, news clipping, administrative documents, printed materials, 1902

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, notes, 1903

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1904

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, notes, 1905 [1/2]

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, notes, 1905 [2/2]

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1906-1907

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1910

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1912

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**Folder 8**

Reprints of old courses, correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1915

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1916

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1917

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, news clippings, 1918

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1919

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Fund, Rockefeller, Packard, Richardson and Appleget, correspondence, administrative documents, 1921-1935

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The truth about the Bible, 1923

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Sample of old promotional material, 1919-1925

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Reports to the President of the University of Chicago, 1923-1934

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1924

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How to enjoy the Bible, 1924

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Advertising copy, 1924-1926

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1925

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**Folder 5**

Auditor's receipts for the Special Fund, monthly financial reports, promotional letters, 1925-1926

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Beginning of Biblical pamphlets, 1925-1928

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Record book, printed materials, 1926

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Auditor's receipts for Fund, and Monthly financial reports, 1926-1927

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Testimonials, Bible study course, 1926-1927

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Ministers' questionnaire summary and report, 1927

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Correspondence, printed materials, administrative documents, 1927

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Record book, printed materials, 1927

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Promotional letters, 1927 [1/2]

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Auditor's receipts for Fund, and monthly financial reports, 1927-1928

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Auditor's receipts for Fund, monthly financial reports and Auditor's monthly reports, 1928-1929

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"Mailing room record in one year before the Depression," 1928-1929

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Promotional letters, printed materials, 1929-1930

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Auditor's receipts for Funds Fund lists, Auditor's monthly reports, and mailing records, 1929-1930

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Material for President's report, 1931-1932

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Auditor's receipts, Fund lists, Comptroller's Office, and mailing room records, 1931-1932  
[1/2]

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Promotional letters, 1931-1932

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Auditor's receipts, office receipts, Fund lists, Comptroller's Office, 1931-1933 [1/2]

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Auditor's receipts, office receipts, Fund lists, Comptroller's Office, 1931-1933 [2/2]

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**Folder 1**

Extension lectures, 1932-1933 [1/2]

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Fund correspondence, A-G, Before 1933 [1/2]

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Fund correspondence, A-G, Before 1933 [2/2]

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Fund correspondence, H-Z, Before 1933 [1/2]

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Fund correspondence, H-Z, Before 1933 [2/2]

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Promotional letters, 1933

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Fund receipts and Fund lists, Institute income, Comptroller's Office, 1933-1934 [1/3]

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Fund receipts and Fund lists, Institute income, Comptroller's Office, 1933-1934 [2/3]

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Fund receipts and Fund lists, Institute income, Comptroller's Office, 1933-1934 [3/3]

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State tax, 1933-1939

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Gifts and Comptroller's reports, 1934-1935

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Orientation Courses, 1935-1939

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Spanish translation of AISL pamphlets, 1937

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**Folder 1**

State Tax, 1940-1943

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Correspondence, 1942-1943

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**Folder 3**

Notebook, G. L. Chamberlain Course I Introduction to Bible Teachers of Children, undated

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Notebook, Pedagogy Psychology Teacher Training Course, undated

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Notebook, N. Y. Introduction Teacher Training Course, undated

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**Folder 6**

Notebook, New Reading Courses Introduction and Reviews, undated

**Box 24**

**Folder 1**

Incomplete samples of correspondence courses and old survey courses of the Institute, undated [1/2]

**Box 24**

**Folder 2**

Incomplete samples of correspondence courses and old survey courses of the Institute, undated [2/2]

**Box 24**

**Folder 3**

Complete set of reading course reviews, undated, undated [1/2]

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Complete set of reading course reviews, undated, undated [2/2]

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**Folder 5**

The Institute, vol. I, nos. 1-6, March-August 1917

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The Institute, vol. II, nos. 1-12, September 1917-August 1918,

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The Institute, vol. III, nos. 1-8, 10-11, September 1918-August 1919

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The Institute, vol. IV, nos. 1-10, September 1919-August 1920

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The Institute, vol. V, nos. 1-11, September 1920-August 1921

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The Institute, vol. VI, nos. 1-9, September 1921-May 1922

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The Institute, vol. VII, nos. 1-8, September 1922-April 1923

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The Institute, vol. VIII, nos. 1-8, October 1923-May 1924

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The Institute, vol. IX, nos. 1-9, October 1924-June 1925

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The Institute, vol. X, nos. 1-9, October 1925-June 1926

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The Institute, vol. XI, nos. 1-9, October 1926-June 1927

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The Institute, vol. XII, nos. 1-9, October 1927-June 1928

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The Institute, vol. XIII, nos. 1-8, October 1928-May 1929

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The Institute, vol. XIV, nos. 1-8, October 1929-May 1930  
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The Institute, vol. XV, nos. 1-8, October 1930-May 1931  
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The Old Testament Student, 1889, correspondence, M-Z  
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**Folder 9**  
The Old Testament Student, 1888-1889, correspondence arranged chronologically  
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**Folder 10**  
Miscellaneous articles

- "The American Institute of Sacred Literature, a Historical Sketch, 1881-1902" by John Henry Barrows, reprinted from the Biblical World, March 1902
- "A History of the American Institute of Sacred Literature, Part I, The American Institute of Hebrew" by Richard Myers, March 26, 1943, typescript, 22 pp.
- "A History of the American Institute of Sacred Literature, Part II, The American Institute of Sacred Literature," typescript, 29 pp., 2 copies

**Box 26**

**Folder 11**

Miscellaneous publications of the AISL

- Postal Bulletin to the Members of the Bible Students' Reading Guild, nos. 4 and 7, 1898
- Five-Minutes Leaflets, undated
- Gilkey, C. W., "What is Inspiration?," undated
- Harvey, BCH, "The Religion of an Anatomist," undated
- Mathews, S., "The Modernist Believes," undated
- Mathews, S., "Christ's Interpretation of His Second Coming, undated"
- Popular Religion Leaflets, undated
- Fosdick, H. E., "Religion Plus Intelligence," undated
- Beaven, A. W., "Positive v. Negative Goodness," undated
- Mathews, S., "Why Denominations?," undated
- Popular Religion leaflets, Bible Series, undated
- "The Sermon on the Mount," undated
- "The letter to the Galatians," undated
- Popular Religion leaflets, Good-will Series, undated
- Hough, L. H., "Good-will Between Churches," undated
- Popular Religion leaflets, Science and Religion Series, undated
- Schmucker, S. C., "Through Science to God," undated
- Conklin, E. G., "Evolution and the Bible," undated
- Mather, Kirtley, "The Religion of a Geologist," undated
- Popular Religion leaflets, Why I Believe Series, undated
- Brown, W. A., "Why I Believe in God," undated
- Macintosh, D. C., "Why I Believe in Immortality," undated
- Stifler, J. M., "Why I Believe in Worship," undated
- Supplementary catalogue of books as of September 1940
- "A Short History of Christianity; a new study course," advertising circular, undated