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Descriptive Summary

Identifier         ICU.SPCL.COOK
Title              Cook, Orator F. Papers
Date               1889-1898
Size               3.5 linear ft. (7 boxes)
Repository         Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library
                   1100 East 57th Street
                   Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract           Orator F. Cook, botanist. The Orator F. Cook Papers consist of materials pertaining to
                   Cook's activities in Liberia from 1889 to 1898 including correspondence, clippings, business
                   records and photographs. The collection also includes biographical materials about Cook.

Acknowledgments

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

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about any of the images in this collection.

Citation
When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Cook, Orator F. Papers,
[Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note
Orator F. Cook was an American botanist who specialized in cotton and rubber plants, as well as
in the classification of palms. Born in 1867 in Clyde, New York, Cook graduated from Syracuse
University in 1890, where he stayed on as an instructor for one year. He traveled extensively
in many parts of the world collecting botanical specimens, and from 1891 to 1898 he was
employed as a special agent of the New York State Colonization Society. He spent much of his
time in Liberia, and in 1896, Cook was elected president of Liberia College, a position, which
he held until 1898. From 1898 he served as a plant scientist with the U. S. Department of
Agriculture, where he became Principal Botanist. He published almost four hundred books and
articles during his life, and was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Science by Syracuse University
in 1930.

Scope Note
The collection has been divided into six series. Series I, General Correspondence includes
exchanges related to Cook’s work in Liberia and with his scientific colleagues. Series II, Personal
Correspondence, primarily contains letters between Cook and Alice Carter, who he married in
1892. Series III contains documents related to Liberia, as does Series VI (oversize materials.)
Series IV includes photographs of Liberia and the Canary Islands. Series V is a biographical
calendar of Cook’s life, prepared by his daughter Helen Newman.

Related Resources
Browse finding aids by topic.

Subject Headings
• Cook, O. F. (Orator Fuller). 1867-1949
• Canary Islands
• Liberia
• Botanists
• Photographs.

INVENTORY
Series I: General Correspondence
These letters are organized alphabetically, and include correspondence from J. Braman of the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia, Charles Geyer of the New York Colonization Society, and Reverend George Goll of the Board of Foreign Missions, as well as letters from colleagues who participated in his survey of Mount Coffee, Liberia, such as botanists Guy Collins and Fred Straub. There is extensive correspondence with Lucien M. Underwood, Cook’s teacher at Syracuse University.

Box 1
Folder 1
  Allen - Agassiz
Box 1
Folder 2
  Barclay - Buchanan
Box 1
Folder 3
  Cheeseman - Coleman
Box 1
Folder 4
  Collins, Guy
Box 1
Folder 5
  Cook - Currie
Box 1
Folder 6
  Daly - Ennis
Box 1
Folder 7
  Fair - Frisell
Box 1
Folder 8
  Geyer, Charles (New York State Colonization Society)
Box 1
Folder 9
  Gibson - Goll
Box 1
Folder 10
  Goode - Goche
Box 1
Folder 11
  Hartzell - Hookway
Box 1
Folder 12
  Houghton
Box 1
Folder 13
  Houghton - Locke
Box 1
Folder 14
   McCabe - Merrill
Box 1
Folder 15
   Merrick - Morgan
Box 1
Folder 16
   New York Age - Osborne
Box 1
Folder 17
   Page - Public Opinion Company
Box 2
Folder 1
   Richardson - Sevier
Box 2
Folder 2
   Sharp
Box 2
Folder 3
   Sharp - Stewart
Box 2
Folder 4
   Straub, Fred
Box 2
Folder 5
   Straub, cont.
Box 2
Folder 6
   Straub, cont.
Box 2
Folder 7
   Taylor - Thompson
Box 2
Folder 8
   Trio Club - True
Box 2
Folder 9
   Underwood, Lucien
Box 2
Folder 10
   Underwood, cont.
Box 2
Folder 11
   Underwood, cont.
Box 2
Series II: Personal Correspondence

This series primarily consists of correspondence between Orator Cook and Alice Carter, who he married in 1892. These letters highlight their private interests and concerns, but also contain information pertaining to Cook’s whereabouts during his travels and his general plans. Miscellaneous letters from other family members also appear in this series, as well as some of Alice’s letters to friends at Mount Holyoke College where she taught botany.
Box 3
Folder 9
  Alice Carter to Orator Cook, July 1896 - August 1897
Box 3
Folder 10
  Alice Carter to Orator Cook, October 1897 - November 1897
Box 3
Folder 11
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, June 1891 - July 1891
Box 3
Folder 12
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, August 1891 - September 1891
Box 3
Folder 13
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, October 1891 - December 1891
Box 3
Folder 14
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, January 1892 - June 1892
Box 3
Folder 15
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, July 1892 - October 1892
Box 3
Folder 16
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, April 1893 - March 1894
Box 4
Folder 1
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, March 1894 - November 1895
Box 4
Folder 2
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, December 1895
Box 4
Folder 3
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, January 1896 - July 1896
Box 4
Folder 4
  Orator Cook to Alice Carter, November 1896 - November 1897

Series III: Liberian Documents

These documents include articles and clippings on Liberia, information on Liberian folklore, articles on botany, and miscellaneous business material.

Box 4
Folder 5
  Liberia (magazine of the American Colonization Society), February 1898 and November 1898, including articles by Cook; clippings on colonization
Folder 6

Box 4
Folder 7
African Planter, 1894-1895 (incomplete run)

Box 4
Folder 8
Newspaper clippings and pamphlets on lynching and racial conflicts in the United States, 1890s-1900s

Box 4
Folder 9
Newspaper clippings and pamphlets on lynching and racial conflicts in the United States, cont.

Box 4
Folder 10
Clippings and articles on Liberia

Box 4
Folder 11
Drafts of official documents related to Liberian interests, 1890s; typescript drafts of articles on colonization by Cook; typescript "Report upon Collections made in Liberia, West Africa, February to March 1897," by Rolla P. Currie

Box 4
Folder 12
Notes on Liberian folklore

Box 5
Folder 1
Lucien M. Underwood and other authors, off-prints dealing with botanical subjects, 1890s-1900s

Box 5
Folder 2
Guy Collins, obituary (off-print, with original photograph attached); remarks by the Secretary of Agriculture for the presentation of the Meyer Medal to "David Fairchild, Plant Explorer," 1939

Box 5
Folder 3
Miscellaneous Programs

Box 5
Folder 4
Invoice statements relating to research and expedition supplies, 1891-1892

Box 5
Folder 5
Invoice statements relating to research and expedition supplies, 1893-1894

Box 5
Folder 6
  Invoice statements relating to research and expedition supplies, 1895-1896
Box 5
Folder 7
  Orator Cook’s personal account book and general log, regarding work for the New York
  State Colonization Society and others
Box 5
Folder 8
  Miscellaneous documents related to international trade

Series IV: Photographs
These are black and white photographs of the people and landscape of Liberia and the Canary
Islands, 1890s-1900s, in various formats. Some of the photographs are identified on the verso.

Box 5
Folder 9
  Canary Islands
Box 5
Folder 10
  Canary Islands
Box 5
Folder 11
  Liberia
Box 5
Folder 12
  Liberia
Box 5
Folder 13
  Liberia, views of “The Farm”

Series V: Biographical Materials
These documents are a general biographical calendar. This calendar description of Cook’s life
spans 1891-1897. It was prepared by his daughter, Helen Newman.

Box 6
Folder 1
  Biographical calendar of Cook’s life, March 1891-December 1892
Box 6
Folder 2
  Biographical calendar of Cook’s life, January 1893-1897
Folder 3

Box 6
Folder 4
Pamphlets bound together into one volume
• Act Incorporating Liberia College, Monrovia, 1864
• The Laws of Liberia College, Cambridge, 1883
• Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the New York State Colonization Society, New York, 1864
• Charter, Constitution and By-Laws of the New York State Colonization Society, New York, 1891
• A Statement of the Condition of Liberia College, Monrovia, 1894
• Acts Passed by the Legislature of the Republic of Liberia, Monrovia, 1894
• Report of the Dr. Charles E. Thomson and Prof. Guy N. Collins to the Board of Managers of the New York State Colonization Society, 1892
• Reports of Prof. O.F. Cook to the Board of Managers..., New York, 1892
• Second Report of Prof. O.F. Cook to the Board of Managers..., New York, 1894; with notes, tipped in, and holograph annotations

Series VI: Oversize Materials
This series primarily holds newspapers and other printed material from Liberia.

Box 7
Folder 1
Liberia Gazette, 1894-1985 (incomplete run)

Box 7
Folder 2
Lagos Weekly Record, 1894-1895 (incomplete run)

Box 7
Folder 3
Publications
• Voice of Missions (Atlanta, George) March 1897
• The colored American (Washington, D.C.) August 20, 1898
• The New York Age, December 19, 1895

Box 7
Folder 4
Orator Cook, Memorial to the People and Government of Liberia, January 17, 1896 (2 copies)

Box 7
Folder 5
Afrikanische Dampfschiffs-Actien-Gesellschaft, Woermann-Linnie (shipping passenger boat time-table, Hamburg to West Africa route), July to September 1894; and Woermann-Linie, 1896, both schedule annotated with the names of the captains