

University of Chicago Library

Guide to the Zella Allen Dixson Papers 1876-1910



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier ICU.SPCL.DIXSON

Title Dixon, Zella Allen. Papers

Date 1876-1910

Size 0.5 linear feet (1 box)

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

Abstract Zella Allen Dixon (1858-1924), librarian, served as de facto head of the University of Chicago Library from 1891 until 1910. The papers consist of loose leaves from a scrapbook compiled by Mrs. Dixon from 1876 to 1910. Except for three topical folders, the material is arranged chronologically. Included are letters from Melvil Dewey and Thomas W. Goodspeed; brochures describing her library science courses at the University; offprints of various ephemeral articles; and photographs of her summer home, Wisteria Cottage, in Granville, Ohio.

Acknowledgments

Information on Use

Access

No restrictions.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Dixon, Zella Allen. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note

Zella Allen Dixon (1858-1924) was born in Zanesville, Ohio, and received an A.B. from Mount Holyoke College in 1880. Her second degree, an A.M. from Shepardson College, was received in 1892. After a brief marriage to Joseph E. Dixon ended with her husband's death in 1885, Mrs. Dixon entered Columbia College in New York as a student of library methodology under Melvil Dewey. At the end of her first year at Columbia, and with Dewey's reluctant approval, she left to organize a series of community and college libraries in Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, a period of independent professional work which culminated in her appointment as librarian at Denison University in 1888. Two years later, she accepted the position of librarian at the Baptist Union Theological Seminary in Morgan Park, Illinois, where she quickly attracted the notice of trustee Thomas W. Goodspeed. In July, 1891, at Goodspeed's

urging, President William Rainey Harper named Mrs. Dixson to supervise the operation of the University of Chicago Library. She assumed the position of Assistant Librarian in the fall of 1892, was promoted to Associate Librarian in 1895, and, in the absence of an official University Librarian, remained the de facto head of the Library until her resignation in 1910.

While Mrs. Dixson's duties were largely administrative, she also developed a series of courses in library science for the University Extension. First offered in 1897, these courses had increased to four by 1900: Historical and Literary Outlines of Library Economy; Technical Methods; Bibliography and Reference Work; and Principles of Library Administration. Other professional interests were reflected in two books written by Mrs. Dixson. The first, *The Comprehensive Subject Index to Universal Prose Fiction* (1897), was a distillation of her experience as a cataloguer and organizer of libraries. The second, *Concerning Book-Plates: A Handbook for Collectors* (1903), revealed her attraction to an esoteric field and had the added distinction of being published by the Wisteria Cottage Press, a private press operated by Mrs. Dixson from a small building behind her Hyde Park home.

Scope Note

The papers consist of loose leaves from a scrapbook compiled by Mrs. Dixson from 1876 to 1910. Except for three topical folders, the material is arranged chronologically. Included are letters from Melvil Dewey and Thomas W. Goodspeed; brochures describing her library science courses at the University; offprints of various ephemeral articles; and photographs of her summer home, Wisteria Cottage, in Granville, Ohio.

Related Resources

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

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

Presidents' Papers, 1889-1925

University Library. Records

Thomas W. Goodspeed. Papers

Ernest De Witt Burton. Papers

Subject Headings

- Dixson, Zella Allen, 1858-1924.
- Library education.
- Librarians.

INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1

1876-1890

Box 1

Folder 2

1891-1893

Box 1

Folder 3

1895-1896

Box 1

Folder 4

1896-1898, announcements and reviews of The Comprehensive Subject Index to Universal Prose Fiction (1897)

Box 1

Folder 5

1897-1898

Box 1

Folder 6

1899-January 1902

Box 1

Folder 7

March 1902-1904

Box 1

Folder 8

1905-1906

Box 1

Folder 9

1908-1909

Box 1

Folder 10

1910

Box 1

Folder 11

Biographical material, undated

Box 1

Folder 12

Bookplates