

University of Chicago Library

Guide to the University of Chicago Library Office of the Director, Zella Allen Dixson, Records 1892-1910



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.LIBRARY1
Title	University of Chicago. Library. Office of the Director. Zella Allen Dixon. Records
Date	1892-1910
Size	14 linear ft. (12 boxes and 32 volumes)
Repository	Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
Abstract	The University of Chicago Library Records contain correspondence, memoranda, minutes, committee reports, budgets, annual reports, accession records, personnel files, the Library Handbook, brochures, and scrapbooks. Materials in the collection document the tenure of Zella Allen Dixon as Assistant Librarian (1892-1895) and Associate Librarian (1895-1910). Also included is material from the administrations of Ernest DeWitt Burton as Director (1910-1925) and J.C.M. Hanson as Associate Director (1910-1927) and Acting Director (1927-1928). Topics include the establishment of the new University's library, library administration, library policies, the Berlin Collection, departmental libraries versus a central library, Harper Memorial Library, classification, gifts and accessions, extension libraries, staffing, information on other libraries, adequate space for collections, and dissertations.

Information on Use

Access

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Citation

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Historical Note

The first period in the history of the University Library, extending from the opening of the University in 1892 to the end of Zella Allen Dixson's administration in 1910, was marked by a continuing debate between proponents of departmental libraries and advocates of a consolidated central library. While decentralization of library resources was a common pattern at many colleges and universities during the late nineteenth century, departmental autonomy developed to an unusual degree at the University of Chicago. The recurring waste and inefficiency of acquisition and cataloging under a departmental system drew repeated criticism during the first eighteen years of the University Library's existence, yet the convenience afforded individual departments and faculty served to insure the retention of dispersed book collections.

The origin of these difficulties lay in William Rainey Harper's initial plan for the organization of the University Library. According to the prospectus issued in the first two numbers of the *Official Bulletin* (January and April 1891), the University Library was to consist of a General Library and a supporting series of departmental, laboratory, classroom, and extension libraries. The University Librarian, the chief administrative figure, was to be an executive officer of the University working under the direction of the University Council. The Librarian would have direct control of the General Library and supervise the operation of the departmental and auxiliary libraries. Each academic department was to be provided its own library and reading room, developed in consultation with the department head and controlled by an adviser appointed from the faculty.

This plan, never more than a rudimentary outline, was temporarily laid aside once Harper turned his attention to the acquisition of books and the recruitment of library staff. In July 1891, Zella Allen Dixson, the librarian of the Baptist Union Theological Seminary, was appointed Assistant Librarian on a half-time basis, with full-time duties to begin in October 1892. Dixson was to prepare the 10,000-volume B.U.T.S. library for transfer to the University of Chicago campus, and there supervise its integration with the 40,000-volume library being received as a legacy of the Old University of Chicago. Several weeks after Dixson's appointment, Harper augmented these collections with a remarkable purchase made in the course of a European tour: the entire stock of the Berlin book dealer S. Calvary, said to number 450,000 volumes. Although the University ultimately received only 96,650 volumes of books and theses from Calvary, the acquisition of the so-called "Berlin Collection" placed the University Library immediately on par with the largest academic libraries in the country.

The size of these holdings and the complexity of organization envisioned by Harper made the appointment of a strong experienced University Librarian crucial. Harper felt he had found such a personality in Zella Dixson's mentor, Melvil Dewey, creator of the Dewey classification system and head of the innovative state library school in Albany, New York. During negotiations with Harper in early 1892, Dewey expressed an interest in assuming the dual position of University Librarian and Director of the University Extension, offering as well to bring his library school to the University of Chicago. Negotiations collapsed, however, when the New York state regents reassured Dewey of their support and granted him a substantial raise in salary. With Dewey's services lost and other matters pressing him from all sides, Harper suspended the search for a University Librarian and allowed the day-to-day supervision of the General Library to fall to Zella Dixson.

The most serious problem faced by the University Library during its first year of operation was the lack of an adequate building to house the book collections. Although Henry Ives Cobb's plan for the campus had included an impressive University Hall and Library on Ellis Avenue, no donor was ever found to provide funds for the structure. Instead, the General Library was housed in temporary space on the second floor of Cobb Hall during Autumn Quarter, 1892. In January 1893, the Library was moved into new quarters in a temporary Gymnasium-Library located in the northeast quadrangle of the campus. This one-story building, constructed as quickly and cheaply as possible, held the General Library stacks, offices, and reading room, as well as a women's gymnasium, a men's gymnasium, and the offices of the University Press. Constantly exposed to the dangers of fire and storm, the General collections remained in this overcrowded space until September 1902, when they were transferred to the second and third floors of the new University Press Building at 58th and Ellis. A final move to permanent quarters in Harper Memorial Library did not come until 1912.

Continual problems of space were compounded by the difficulties of inadequate administration. When the Library opened in the fall of 1892, it had been made part of one of the five divisions of the University, the University Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums, which was to include the General and departmental libraries, the General Museum and all special museums, and the

laboratories of the University with their apparatus and materials. The division was to be headed by the Director of the University Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums, but this position, like the position of University Librarian, was never filled. In the absence of a Director or a University Librarian, the main administrative responsibilities devolved on the Board of Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums, a fifteen-member body formed in January 1893. The Board, consisting of President Harper, Zella Dixson, and members appointed from the faculty, soon found itself immersed in such matters as the pasting of labels into books, the setting of fines, the wording of gift acknowledgements, and the enforcement of regulations governing the printing and distribution of University theses and dissertations.

By far the greatest portion of the Board's time, however, was devoted to the persistently troublesome issue of departmental libraries. Organized informally as soon as the University opened, these libraries quickly began ordering books and establishing catalogs and rules under the direction of the faculty adviser and his student assistants. Four departmental libraries were already in operation by the end of Autumn Quarter, 1892; by early 1893, there were thirteen, and by Spring Quarter, 1895, the number had increased dramatically to twenty-four. The lack of a central library building and the inadequate space available for the General Library collections might have forced the development of a departmental system in any case, but the strong influence of the departments and their faculty, when combined with the lack of a strong Library administrator, made the drift of events permanent. Departmental libraries were soon scattered all over the growing campus, and provision for them became a standard element of each newly constructed University building. By 1898, departmental libraries held 65,000 volumes housed in forty-two separate rooms in ten buildings: Kent Laboratory, for example had three rooms devoted to the Chemistry, Public Speaking, and Music libraries, while Cobb Hall had eighteen library rooms holding seven departmental collections ranging from History and Political Economy to English.

The problems inherent in such a poorly controlled system were readily apparent. The fact that departmental libraries were administered by a faculty member, not a professional librarian and that the staff consisted solely of graduate students meant that cataloging was often irregular or incomplete. As departments moved frequently from building to building, so did the libraries—so frequently, in fact, and with such little concern for the system that in 1898 the Board directed departments not to move their libraries without first giving notice. Volumes in departmental libraries were not intended to circulate (except over-night in unusual circumstances), but by 1899 the ease of faculty and student access produced such steady losses of books that the Board recommended to the Trustees that a private detective be hired to investigate the situation. Stocks for departmental libraries came in part from departmental purchases, but they also developed through transfers from the holdings of the General Library and the un-cataloged mass of the Berlin Collection. Two or more departmental libraries could thus often claim priority for the transfer of the same volumes as each attempted to fortify its own holdings at the expense of the General collections.

Increasingly, the Board of Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums was forced to enter the fray as an adjudicator of such disputes and of other questions arising from the management of the departmental libraries. In 1895, William I. Thomas of the Sociology Department was appointed Superintendent of Departmental Libraries; he was given "general oversight of the administration of departmental libraries" and charged with examining all departmental book purchase and transfer requests, but his powers were limited to recommendations to the Board on actions it might take. In November 1896, the Board appointed Thomas to head a Committee on the Development of the Departmental Libraries in Connection with the General Library. Thomas's committee, after assessing the complete range of problems generated by the departmental system, recommended that the growth of departmental libraries be rigorously controlled through two new regulations: that 50 per cent of each department's book budget be allocated for books in its field in the General Library, and that each departmental library be limited to 3,000 volumes, after which any new acquisitions would be balanced by transfers back to the General collections. The Board considered Thomas's report in January 1897, but tabled it after an inconclusive discussion.

Efforts to reform the departmental system and plan for the future of the General Library did not resume until two years later. In April 1899, several days after President Harper expressed renewed concern for the physical safety of the General collections, the University Senate appointed a committee consisting of Professors Ernest D. Burton, J. L. Laughlin, Harry P. Judson, T. C. Chamberlin, and John U. Nef to consider the entire Library situation and its relation to educational policy. After surveying alternative systems of organization, the committee recommended that science libraries remain in departmental buildings, but that libraries in the social sciences and modern languages be located in a central library building. Following this lead, the Board of Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums in 1899-1900 directed the consolidation of twelve departmental libraries into three new group libraries: the Classical Group (Comparative Philology, Greek, Latin, and Archaeology); the Historical Group (Political Economy, Political Science, History, and Sociology); and the Modern Language Group (Romance Languages, Germanic Languages, English Languages, and English Literature).

In October 1900, the library question was taken up by yet another University body. During the regular quarterly meeting of the University Congregation, Professors Judson and Burton debated the merits of the departmental system, Judson recommending the greatest possible degree of consolidation, while Burton argued that interdisciplinary needs could be met by a consolidated catalog and a system of underground book-railways linking the General and departmental libraries. Following this discussion, the Congregation polled the departmental library committees and found that a consensus existed to permit science buildings to keep their departmental libraries, but that other departmental libraries would agree to locate in a central building only if their separate identities were maintained.

These conclusions were passed on to the Board of Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums, which in turn appointed Burton, Frederick I. Carpenter, and Zella Dixson as a committee to review them. The committee returned its recommendations to the Congregation in November 1901:

that science department libraries be retained in their own buildings; that six Group Libraries (Philosophy and History, Theology and Semitic Languages, Classical Languages, Modern Languages, Mathematics and Astronomy, and Music and Fine Arts) be located in or attached to the General Library; and most significant of all, that the new central library building be located not at the designated Ellis Avenue site but instead on 59th Street at the south edge of campus, near the presumed site of the future social science and modern language buildings. After a second poll of the departments produced no further signs of agreement on the issue of consolidation, the Congregation asked the Board of Trustees to establish a commission to consult with an architect and formulate a proposal for an integrated library system.

The Joint Commission on Library Building and Policy, appointed by the Trustees in June 1902, included President Harper, Trustee Martin Ryerson, and Professors Carpenter, Coulter, Small, Judson, and W. G. Hale, with Burton serving as chairman. After discussions among its members and meetings with architect Charles Coolidge of the firm of Shepley, Ruten & Coolidge, the Commission submitted its report in August 1902. Quickly approved by the Congregation, the report was endorsed by the Trustees in September 1902. In short, the Commission's plan called for the central library to be housed in a long narrow building on a constricted site at the south edge of the quadrangles. The central library would be surrounded by departmental buildings, each with its own group library, and would be connected to them by bridges. To the west would be erected the Modern Language and Classics buildings, with the Historical and Social Science departments to the east, and Law, Philosophy, and Divinity to the north. The Commission also proposed the creation of a general catalog which would include the holdings of both the General and departmental libraries. The central building itself, housing the General Library, and some departmental stacks, was to provide space for 1,500,000 to 1,750,000 books and permit the growth of the General and Humanities Group collections for the next 75 to 100 years. Shortly after the adoption of the Commission's report, President Harper appointed Burton to tour libraries, universities, and colleges in the eastern United States and report on physical and administrative solutions to library problems adopted at other institutions. Burton's suggestions were incorporated into ongoing planning for the central library, although funds for construction of the building had not yet appeared.

When President Harper died in January 1906, the idea quickly grew that some sort of permanent memorial to his name should be established on campus. John D. Rockefeller agreed to give up to \$600,000 toward the erection of a library in Harper's memory if \$200,000 could be raised from other sources. This was quickly accomplished through the creation of the Harper Memorial Fund. Ground for Harper Memorial Library was finally broken on January 10, 1910, and the cornerstone was laid on June 14.

1910 was a turning point in the Library's history in another sense as well. Not only was the long-needed central building underway, but, Zella Dixon resigned her position as Associate Librarian effective July 1. Although the official announcement stated that she was leaving to devote her time to private literary interests, it appears likely that her resignation was forced. During her eighteen years as head of the General Library, Dixon had often been the focus of

faculty complaints. Her courses in library science, first offered through the Extension in 1897, drew such criticism from the American Library Association that the University dropped them in 1902. Part of Burton's tour of the East in 1903 had in fact been devoted to inquiries about possible successors to Dixon.

If Zella Dixon's departure was a propitious development, the end of the first period in the Library's history was nevertheless marked by irony. President Harper's inability to secure the services of a University Librarian was, as Richard Storr has noted, his greatest and most puzzling failure as an academic organizer, while Harper's devotion to the departmental system had set in motion precisely those forces which made the construction of the library named in his honor so tortuously difficult to achieve. As late as 1903, in the wake of the Library Commission's report, Harper still found himself, in the President's Decennial Report, satisfied with the departmental system: "Without question," he wrote, "this policy is attended with some disadvantages, but upon the whole it may be said that it secures advantages which more than outweigh the disadvantages." Zella Dixon's successors, Ernest D. Burton and J. C. M. Hanson, would have to confront the legacy of this position, the organizational weakness it had encouraged, and the awkward administrative compromises it had produced, embodied now in the permanent form of Harper Memorial Library.

Scope Note

The University of Chicago Library Records, Series I contains correspondence, memoranda, minutes, committee reports, budgets, annual reports, accession records, personnel files, the Library Handbook, brochures, and scrapbooks. Materials in the collection document the tenure of Zella Allen Dixon as Assistant Librarian (1892-1895) and Associate Librarian (1895-1910). Also included is material from the administrations of Ernest DeWitt Burton as Director (1910-1925) and J.C.M. Hanson as Associate Director (1910-1927) and Acting Director (1927-1928). Topics include the establishment of the new University's library, library administration, library policies, the Berlin Collection, departmental libraries versus a central library, Harper Memorial Library, classification, gifts and accessions, extension libraries, staffing, information on other libraries, adequate space for collections, and dissertations.

Series I: BIOGRAPHICAL

Series I: ADMINISTRATION

Series II: ACCESSIONS

Series III: CLASSIFICATION

Series IV: EXTENSION LIBRARIES

Series V: EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

Series VI: SCRAPBOOKS

Series VII: ASSOCIATIONS AND CONFERENCES

Related Resources

Browse finding aids by topic.

Subject Headings

- Burton, Ernest De Witt, 1856-1925
- Hanson, J. C. M. (James Christian Meinich), 1864-1943
- Dixson, Zella Allen, 1858-1924
- Calvary, S., & Co., Berlin
- University of Chicago. Library
- University of Chicago. Library. Order of the Grey Towers
- University of Chicago. Library
- Academic libraries
- Librarians
- Academic librarians

INVENTORY

Series I: Administration

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Board of Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums; minutes, 1897-1903

Box 1

Folder 2

Board of Libraries, Laboratories, 1904-1910 and undated

Box 1

Folder 3

Library Reports, 1892-1901 (holograph annual reports subsequently published in the President's Report)

Box 1

Folder 4

Board of Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums, Committee on the Grouping of Departmental Libraries, Report, February 25, 1889.

Box 1

Folder 5

- University Senate, Committee on Educational Questions Connected with the Plans for a General Library Building, Report, April 7, 1900
- University Congregation, Committee on Departmental Libraries, Report, October 26, 1900

Box 1

Folder 6

Board of Libraries, Laboratories, and Museums, Committee on the Relation of Departmental Libraries to the General Library, Report, February 23, 1901

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University Congregation, Committee on Library Building, Substitute Report, November 18, 1901

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Joint Commission on Library Building and Policy, Report, August 28, 1902

Box 1

Folder 9

Burton, Ernest D., report to President Harper on a tour of Eastern libraries, universities, and colleges, March 21, 1903

Box 1

Folder 10

Dixson, Zella Allen, "The University Library," Decennial Publications, Vol. I (1903), pp. 223-265

Box 1

Folder 11

[Burton, Ernest D.], "Outline History of the Legislation of University Bodies on the Question of Departmental Libraries and Their Relation to the General Library," Decennial Publications, Vol. I (1903), pp. 266-275, drafts

Box 1

Folder 12

Correspondence, 1892-1894

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Departmental libraries, Superintendent, duties of, undated

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Fire insurance, 1893, 1909, and undated

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Harper Memorial Fund, correspondence, 1906-1907

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Harper Memorial Fund, list of subscribers

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Loan Department, 1895-1900

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Missing books, 1895-1897

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Staff, departmental advisers and attendants, 1895-1897

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Staff, employment applications, 1892-1898

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Staff, employment applications, 1899-1905

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Staff, employment applications, 1906-1909

Series II: Accessions

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Accession reports, 1897-1910

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Accession reports, 1904-1910

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Accession Books 1-10000 (Baptist Union Theological Seminary)

Volume 2

Accession Books, 10001-20000

Volume 3

Accession Books, 20001-30000

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/library1-vol3-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/library1-vol3-02>

View digitized documents, part 3. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/library1-vol3-03>

- Volume 4**
Accession Books, 30001-40000
- Volume 5**
Accession Books, 40001-50000
- Volume 6**
Accession Books, 50001-60000
- Volume 7**
Accession Books, 60001-70000
- Volume 8**
Accession Books, 70001-80000
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- Volume 10**
Accession Books, 90001-100000
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Accession Books, 190001-200000
- Volume 21**
Accession Books, 200001-210000
- Volume 22**
Accession Books, 210001-220000
- Volume 23**
Accession Books, 220001-230000 (Bernays Library)
- Volume 24**
Accession Books, 230001-240000
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Accession Books, 240001-250000
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Accession Books, 260001-270000

Volume 28

Accession Books, 270001-280000

Volume 29

Accession Books, 280001-290000

Volume 30

Accession Books, 290001-300000 (Law School)

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Accession Books, 300001-310000

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Accession Books, 310001-320000

Box 5

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Lists of books purchased or suggested for purchase, faculty

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Lists of books purchased or suggested for purchase, departments

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Lists of books purchased or suggested for purchase, Morgan Park Academy

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Lists of books purchased or suggested for purchase, General Library, 1894

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Lists of books purchased or suggested for purchase, General Library, 1895

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Lists of books purchased or suggested for purchase, General Library, 1896

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Lists of books purchased or suggested for purchase, General Library, 1898-1903

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Lists of books purchased or suggested for purchase, General Library, undated

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Berlin Collection, correspondence, 1891-1895

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Berlin Collection, sets and serial publications

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Berlin Collection, duplicates in General Library

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Durrett collection, "The Durrett Collection, Now in the Library of the University of Chicago," by Edward A. Henry, galley proofs, undated

Box 5

Folder 13

Law Library, "Statement Regarding Law Book Buying," undated

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Gift reports, 1893-1910

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Gifts accessioning procedures, undated

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Correspondence, 1896-1909 and undated

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Regulations governing submission and publication of theses, 1902-1909

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Institutions receiving U of C theses, 1906, 1909

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"Memorandum on Theses and Programs of Foreign Universities in the U. of C. Library," undated

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Ph.D. theses received, 1894-1909

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Master's theses not received, 1894-1910

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U of C (Dewey) classification schedules, 348-547

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U of C (Dewey) classification schedules, 572-581

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U of C (Dewey) classification schedules, 610-615

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U of C (Dewey) classification schedules, 839-921

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John Crerar Library classification schedule, undated

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Folder 18

Schwartz Classification (1871-1872)

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Folder 19

Unidentified "Philosophy" schedule, undated

Series IV: Extension Libraries

Box 7

Folder 1

Correspondence, 1893-1895

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-007-001>

Box 7

Folder 2

Correspondence, 1896-1897

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-007-002>

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Folder 3

Correspondence, 1898-1899

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-007-003>

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Folder 4

Correspondence, 1900

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-007-004>

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Folder 5

Correspondence, 1901-1902

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-007-005>

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Folder 6

Report of Traveling Libraries, 1903, 1908, 1909

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-007-006>

Box 7

Folder 7

Accession book, 1896-1903

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-007-007>

Box 7

Folder 8

Accession book, 1903-1910

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-007-008>

Box 8

Folder 1

Invoice lists, 1903-1904

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-008-001-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-008-001-02>

Box 8

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Invoice lists, 1904-1905

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-008-002-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-008-002-02>

Box 8

Folder 3

Invoice lists, 1905-1906

View digitized documents, part 1. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-008-003-01>

View digitized documents, part 2. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-008-003-02>

Box 8

Folder 4

List of Department of Religion books used, 1893-1894

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-008-004>

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Folder 5

Rules and miscellaneous charging lists, 1898 and undated

View digitized documents. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/dixson-008-005>

Series V: Equipment and Supplies

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Advertising brochures, bookcases

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Advertising brochures, shelving and furniture

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Advertising brochures, shelving and furniture

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Advertising brochures, office supplies

Series VI: Scrapbooks

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University of Chicago Library, Official publications

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University of Chicago Library, University Extension traveling libraries

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Arkansas, Conway, Hendrix College Library

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California, Los Angeles, Redlands, and Riverside Public Libraries

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California, Mount Hamilton, Lick Observatory Library

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California, Pasadena Public Library

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California, San Diego Public Library

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California, San Francisco, Sutro Library

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Colorado, Denver Public Library

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Illinois, Bloomington, Withers Public Library

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Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, University of Illinois Library

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Illinois, Chicago, All Souls Church Library

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