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Alexander Smith papers 4230329

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Summary Information

Repository:	Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Creator:	Smith, Alexander
Title:	Alexander Smith papers
ID:	4230329
ID:	UA#0010
Date [inclusive]:	1900-1919
Physical Description:	5.5 linear feet 5 record cartons; 1 document box
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	Professional and personal correspondence of Dr. Alexander Smith, just prior to and during his time as head of the Department of Chemistry at Columbia University (1911-1919).

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Alexander Smith Papers; Box and Folder; University Archives, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

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Biographical Note

Alexander Smith was born on September 11, 1865 in Edinburgh, Scotland son of Alexander and Isabella (Carter) Smith. His grandfather was a sculptor and his father a musician. Smith studied seven years at the Edinburgh Collegiate School and then entered the University of Edinburgh in 1882 where he received his B.S. in chemistry in 1886. Although he spent much of his time at university studying astronomy, upon graduation he realized there was little prospect of making a career in that area and went to study organic chemistry at the University of Munich under Adolph Ritter von Baeyer earning his Ph.D. in 1889. After receiving his doctorate he served one year as an assistant in chemistry at the University of Edinburgh. During the period 1890 to 1894 he was professor of chemistry and mineralogy at Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana. In 1894 he came to the University of Chicago as an assistant

professor of chemistry. He was associate professor of chemistry from 1898 to 1903 and professor of chemistry from 1904 until he left the University of Chicago in 1911. During two years of this period he was dean of the Junior Colleges. In 1911 he left the University of Chicago to become professor and head of the department of chemistry at Columbia University where he remained until illness compelled him to retire in 1919.

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Biographical Note

Dr. Smith was a member of the National Academy of Sciences (1915) and an honorary member of the Spanish Society of Physics and Chemistry (1911). In 1911 he was president of the American Chemical Society. In 1912 he received the Keith Prize and Medal from the Royal Society of Edinburgh for his groundbreaking studies on the forms of sulfur. In 1919, the University of Edinburgh awarded him the honorary degree, LL.D. Smith published two very successful textbooks explaining the teaching of chemistry and physics to beginners: *The Teaching of Chemistry and Physics in the High School* (1902), written with Edwin H. Hall and the 1906 *Introduction to General Inorganic Chemistry*.

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Biographical Note

On February 16, 1905 Alexander Smith married Sara Bowles of Memphis, TN. They had two children, Isabella Carter Smith, born February 8, 1909 and William Bowles Smith, born October 27, 1910. After three years battling a lingering illness, Alexander Smith died on September 8, 1922 in Edinburgh.

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Biographical Note

(The above information was taken from *Biography Resource Center*. The Gale Group, 2003; *Alexander Smith, The Investigator* [reprinted from *Journal of Chemical Education*, Vol. 9, No. 2. February, 1932] by Ralph H. McKee; and *National Academy of Sciences: Biographical Memoir Alexander Smith, 1865-1922* by William A. Noyes [Vol. XXI, twelfth memoir, 1923].

For more biographical information on Alexander Smith, see UA #0004 Historical Biographical Files.)

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Summary

The collection contains correspondence, both professional and personal, generated by and sent to Dr. Alexander Smith just prior to and during his time as head of the Department of Chemistry at Columbia University, 1911 through 1919. Although the collection consists primarily of correspondence, it also includes meeting minutes, reports, and printed matter from organizations and projects with which Smith was associated. Correspondence is with colleagues outside and within the Columbia community as well as with family, vendors and billing agents. Professional topics include personnel issues, recommendation requests and letters, inquiries regarding positions (both teaching and studying) within Columbia and at other institutions, speeches and lectures Smith was either asked to make or attend, advice on chemical patents, requests for chemical analyses, invitations to meetings and conferences, and chemistry curriculum issues. Personal correspondence includes letters with family members in Scotland and the United States, billing and service queries with vendors, insurance and investment correspondence, as well as information concerning real estate in Chicago and in Pulaski, VA.

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Arrangement

Arranged in two series.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Butler Library, 6th Floor
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Revision Description

xml document instance created by Alison Rhonemus EAD was imported spring 2019 as part of the ArchivesSpace Phase II migration. 2012-02-07 2019-05-20

Restrictions on Access

There are no restrictions on this collection.

Restrictions on Access

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Controlled Access Headings

- Smith, Alexander

Collection Inventory

Series I: Professional, 1900-1919

Scope and Contents

This series consists of primarily professional correspondence of Alexander Smith before and during his time at Columbia University. Among the topics that appear with frequency are: personnel issues, recommendation requests and letters, inquiries regarding positions (both teaching and studying) within

Columbia and at other institutions, information about appointments and changes at other universities around the country, updates on various people within the profession, speeches or lectures Smith was asked to make or attend, professional organization matters, advice for companies involved in patenting a product, requests for chemical analyses, invitations to meetings/conferences, and chemistry curriculum issues. Many of the files in this series are titled by personal names of professors from other institutions as well as those within the Columbia University community. Following are some of the more significant items of interest found within this series.

Scope and Contents

Smith was very involved with the American Chemical Society and these files consist of correspondence to and from Smith regarding those activities (especially when he was president of the organization in 1911), most of the time with Charles L. Parsons, secretary of the organization. Issues such as appointments, delegations of members to events, meetings and conferences, changes to the society's governing documents, monetary issues concerning the journal *Chemical Abstracts*, and the relationship to the International Association of Chemical Societies are addressed at various times. Correspondents also include William A. Noyes of University of Illinois at Urbana and Julius Steiglitz at University of Chicago. In addition to correspondence, there are meeting minutes, nomination letters, copies of governing documents, and a handwritten address by Smith at the opening of the Chemists Club in New York (1911 March 18) within these files.

Scope and Contents

The "Stieglitz, Julius" folder addresses a variety of topics including laboratory space, Ph.D. students, obtaining positions for former students, publications, American Chemical Society issues (he was president of the organization starting in 1917), curriculum issues and research. Steiglitz was a chemistry professor at University of Chicago and he and Smith had a very frequent correspondence between 1911 and 1919.

Scope and Contents

Smith was also actively involved in revising college entrance examinations. In fact, Smith was asked and accepted the chairmanship of a commission to revise the admission requirement in Chemistry (1912 May 1 letter from Professor Morgan to Professor Smith). The folders "College Entrance Examination Board" and "Examinations, College Entrance" both include correspondence, reports and notes concerning these particular exams.

Scope and Contents

The Columbia University Chemistry Department's organization is clearly described in a letter dated 1916 March 27 from Smith to George B. Frankforter and can be found in the folder "Frankforter, George B." A letter dated 1911 March 14 within the "Echlin, Henry M." folder specifically describes the politics of Columbia and the Chemistry department just before Smith came to New York. The "Haesler, Paul C." file deals exclusively with departmental matters, especially Haeseler's position in the department, departmental activities (e.g., 1917 August 21 report on the just ended summer session) as well as Haeseler's side of a dispute with another individual within the department.

Scope and Contents

In 1913 and 1914 Smith considered leaving Columbia for an equivalent position at Princeton University. Within the files "Princeton" and "Inquiries" (June, 1913), there is correspondence about Smith's reasons for considering the position (he wanted his children to have more space than the city could afford), his housing search in the Princeton area, and why he eventually withdrew his acceptance.

Scope and Contents

The "Inquiries" files are very thick and the correspondence in them directed towards Smith address the variety of topics found throughout this series (e.g., applications for positions, recommendations,

invitations, comments on books and articles, meetings, conferences, subscriptions, memberships, requests for chemical analyses, applications to the Columbia Chemistry program, etc.) but instead of being divided into separate files, they are housed together and organized chronologically under this general heading. His responses to the various queries are usually included with the original request.

Scope and Contents

The effects of World War I on Smith's colleagues and his department are also discussed in some of these files. Among the most notable examples are within the "Kendall, James ", "Smith, Anne", and "Walker, James" files. James Kendall was a chemist from Scotland who was part of the Columbia department of Chemistry. He discusses departmental and general chemistry ideas, but more significantly he vividly describes his experiences during WWI, especially his time on a ship targeted by a torpedo shortly after the Lusitania was sunk by German submarines. Anne Smith was Alexander Smith's assistant whose file consists mostly of relayed information from his NY office to his country home in Pulaski, VA during the summer months. In addition to the office matters she often comments on her own situation particularly her 1914 dilemma about returning to Scotland just as WWI is beginning and whether to marry her "friend" or not.

Scope and Contents

James Walker worked in the chemistry department at the University of Edinburgh and he also appears to have owned a factory which was engaged in war work during WWI. His correspondence discusses the effects of the war on his classes (e.g., girls in his chemistry classes) and life, as well as the activities of their mutual friend James Kendall. A discussion of wartime coursework and the possibilities of military service/training substituting for course credit can be found in the "Mayer, R.E." folder. Within the "Scratchard, George" file most of the 1917 correspondence is about this Columbia professor trying to get out of the initial draft on the grounds of participating in government research. The "Cattell, James M." folder includes discussions of details for the National Academy of Sciences meeting at Columbia University in 1915 November but also includes correspondence concerning Cattell's dismissal from the University in 1917 due to his views on the war.

Scope and Contents

In addition to professional matters, sometimes personal issues appear within these correspondence files. The "Menziez, Alan W.C." file is a good example of correspondence which mixes both professional and personal correspondence. Alan Menziez was in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Chicago, then Oberlin and finally at Princeton. His folder contains Smith's recommendations for Menziez for a position at Birmingham University (1919). The "Van Cott, Dr. James" and "Webster, George W." files concern Smith's attempts to find answers and remedies for the illness suffered by Mr. William Bowles, his father-in-law, by contacting the two doctors to discuss and trade ideas and possible solutions.

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Series II: Personal, 1905-1919

Scope and Contents

This series consists of correspondence and printed matter relating to Smith's personal activities. Correspondence includes letters with his family in Scotland, with various vendors regarding bills and services, information regarding investments, insurance, real estate in Chicago, and his country cottage in Pulaski, VA. Of particular note among the family correspondence is that with his sister Isabella and other family members in Scotland regarding a visit by Alexander Smith and his family in the summer in the 1912. The "Correspondence, L.F. Barker" file contains more letters between Smith and this Baltimore doctor about his father-in-law's illness as well as that of his little boy Billie who was quite ill during

1916. The combination of correspondence with vendors, friends and family in this series gives one a small sense of what was involved in running an upper-middle class household in New York City in the 1910s. To aid the researcher, below is a list of family members and their relationship to Smith: Sara (nee Bowles): wife Billie and Isabel: children Mr. and Mrs. William Bowles of Memphis, TN: in-laws Potter Bowles of Chicago, IL: brother-in-law Isabella (Mrs. James Rae) of Edinburgh, Scotland: sister Jane and John Stewart Smith of Portobello, Scotland: aunt and uncle

Title/Description	Instances	
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Warren Gorrell, 1916-1918 <u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)	box 5	folder 38 to 39
Lee Higginson & Co., 1911-1918 <u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)	box 6	folder 1 to 2
Real Estate, 1911-1915 <u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)	box 6	folder 3 to 4
Personal Bills, 1911-1914	box 6	folder 5
Pulaski Cottage, 1913-1915 <u>Physical Description:</u> (2 Folders)	box 6	folder 6 to 7
Storage Companies, 1911	box 6	folder 8

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