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Sophia Lyon Fahs papers4492684

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Description is written in: English.

Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary

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New York, NY 10027

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URL: <https://library.columbia.edu/locations/burke.html>

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Summary Information

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|----------------------------------|--|
| Repository: | Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary |
| Creator: | Fahs, Sophia Lyon, 1876-1978 |
| Creator: | Cobb, Alice |
| Title: | Sophia Lyon Fahs papers |
| ID: | 4492684 |
| Date [inclusive]: | circa 1850 -- 1987 |
| Physical Description: | 3.5 linear feet 3.5 linear feet; 6 boxes and 1 reel box |
| Language of the Material: | English . |
| Abstract: | Sophia Lyon Fahs was a Unitarian educator, author, editor, minister, innovator in religious education of children, one of the first women faculty members at Union Theological Seminary, and wife of Methodist minister Charles Harvey Fahs. The collection contains papers from Sophia Lyon Fahs' UTS Alumni File as well as her personal files, including materials related to her husband Charles Fahs' writings; correspondence with her biographer Edith Hunter as well as general correspondence; Riverside Church Sunday School papers and religious education publications; and materials donated by Dorothy Beck Fahs, including articles about SLF, memorials, and correspondence, as well as drafts and correspondence related to Cobb and Dorothy Fahs' work on <i>Old Tales for a New Day</i> (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1981), the companion volume to Sophia Fahs' earlier books on mythic stories for children. |

Preferred Citation

Item description, UTS1: Sophia Lyon Fahs Papers, series #, box #, folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

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Biographical / Historical

Sophia Blanche Lyon Fahs (née Sophia Blanche Lyon) was born to Presbyterian missionaries in China on August 2, 1876 and died on April 14, 1978 in Hamilton, OH. The Lyon family returned from China when Sophia Lyon Fahs was three years old and raised their family of seven children in Wisconsin and Ohio. In 1897, SLF received her A.B. cum laude from College of Wooster, OH. Two years later she met Charles Harvey Fahs at a Christian Mission Conference, and they married in 1902. They moved to New York City soon afterwards, and Sophia Fahs was offered a scholarship to do her master's work at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she worked with Rev. Frank McMurry, head of the Elementary Education Department. It was at Teachers College, she recollected in 1966, "that I found out what I wanted to do in life, beyond being a wife and a mother—and that was to help in reconstructing the processes and the contents of the religious education of children in the light of mankind's growing understandings." McMurry encouraged the initiation of an experimental Sunday School program that would inspire Sophia Lyon Fahs' further educational work: they pioneered the use of contemporary history and extra-Biblical material in Sunday School education, and her master's thesis, "The Use of Missionary Biographies in Religious Education," resulted from this experience. She finished her MA in 1904, and, a year later, she and Harvey Fahs had their first child. Sophia Lyon Fahs' curiosity about the development of children's religious experiences informed her rearing of her five children, the Sunday School classes she taught in New York and New Jersey, teachers' study groups she led in Community Training Schools, and her directorship of religious education at the Methodist Church of Leonia, NJ. She enrolled at Union Theological Seminary and graduated with a B.D. in 1926. In 1927, Sophia Lyon Fahs and Mary Ely Lyman were the first women to be appointed to Union's faculty. Fahs would remain at Union until 1944 as a lecturer in Religious Education. From 1933 until 1942, she also began supervising and teaching in the Sunday School at the newly built Riverside Church. Rev. C. Ivar Hellstrom, Riverside's Minister of Education, had graduated from Union in 1917 and had been a lecturer at the seminary in religious education between 1926 and 1928. At Riverside, Sophia met and taught with Emily Ellis, Mary Hellstrom, and Alice Cobb. Much of Sophia's later writing drew on her experiences with those Riverside Church School classes. She was hired in 1936 by the American Unitarian Association as the editor of the New Beacon Press Series in Religious Education. Between 1936 and 1951, she wrote or co-wrote at least twenty books for the series. In 1951, Sophia Lyon Fahs transitioned to curriculum consultant, a position she held until she was 88 years old. At the age of 82, in 1959, she was ordained a minister in the Unitarian church.

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Scope and Contents

This collection contains a combination of papers from Sophia Lyon Fahs' UTS Alumni File as well as her personal files, including materials related to her husband Charles Fahs' writings, and an audio reel of an event commemorating a biography of Fahs; Sophia Lyon Fahs' correspondence with her biographer Edith Hunter as well as other general correspondence; Riverside Church Sunday School papers and religious education publications, and writings by Riverside's Rev. C. Ivar Hellstrom; and materials donated by Dorothy Beck Fahs, including articles about SLF, memorials, and correspondence, as well as drafts and correspondence related to Cobb and Dorothy Fahs' work on *Old Tales for a New Day* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1981), the companion volume to Sophia Fahs' earlier books on mythic stories for children.

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Arrangement

This collection is arranged in 4 series: 1. General and alumni files; 2. Correspondence; 3. Riverside Church Sunday School; and 4. Dorothy Fahs Beck papers.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Revision Description

PDF converted to EAD and description updated by Leah Edelman. 2022-05-24

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Access

The following boxes are located offsite: entire collection except audio reel. Please note that requests for use of boxes held in offsite storage must be made three business days in advance.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

These papers were constructed from UTS alumni records and papers donated by Dorothy Fahs Beck in 1981, Emily Ellis in 1982, and Mary Hellstrom circa 1970-1979.

Processing Information

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. Acidic items were photocopied on acid-free paper and separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed. The finding aid was created by Alexis Waller in 2009, revised by Brigitte Kamsler in 2015 and by Rebecca Nieto in 2017 with the support of the Henry Luce Foundation and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, and edited by Leah Edelman in 2022. The audio reel was added to the collection by Leah Edelman and the finding aid was updated in 2025.

Conditions Governing Use

Some material in this collection may be protected by copyright and other rights. Information concerning copyright, fair use, and reproduction requests can be consulted at Columbia's Copyright Advisory Office.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Christian education -- New York (State) -- New York
- Sunday schools -- New York (State) -- New York
- New York (N.Y.) -- Religious life and customs
- Fahs, Sophia Lyon, 1876-1978 -- : Archives
- Hunter, Edith F (Edith Fisher), 1919-
- Cobb, Alice
- Riverside Church (New York, N.Y.)

- Church of the Master (New York, N.Y.)

Burke Library record group:

Union Theological Seminary Archives: UTS 1, papers of faculty and students

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Collection Inventory

Series 1: General and alumni files, circa 1850 -- 1982

Physical Description: 0.5 linear feet 0.75 linear feet; 1 box and 1 reel box

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is unarranged.

Scope and Contents

This series contains a combination of papers from Sophia Lyon Fahs' UTS Alumni File as well as her personal files, including materials related to her husband Charles Fahs' writings. This series also contains an audio reel of an event commemorating a biography of Fahs.

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|--|-----------|----------|
| Correspondence, Writings by SLF, Ordination Service Pamphlet and Address, 1906 -- 1970 | box 1.1 | folder 1 |
| Articles about SLF, Clippings, 1942 -- 1978 | box 1.1 | folder 2 |
| Liberal Religious Education Director's Association Lectureship Correspondence and Address by DFB, 1973 -- 1974 | box 1.1 | folder 3 |
| Riverside Church Ministers/UTS copied Correspondence on SLF's Teaching Controversy, 1936 | box 1.1 | folder 4 |
| Alumni File, 1923-67, includes. SLF's Reminiscences and Concerns, 1966 | box 1.1 | folder 5 |
| Alumni File News Clipping, Kairos, 1976 | box 1.1 | folder 6 |
| Group Class Photo, circa 1910 -- 1919 | box 1.1 | folder 7 |

| | | |
|---|---------|-----------|
| Sophia Fahs and Three Sunday Schools on Morningside Heights, by UTS student Ruthmary Pollack, 1982 | box 1.1 | folder 8 |
| Religious Education Academic Papers by Charles Young, 1951; by Robert C. Brown, 1981 | box 1.1 | folder 9 |
| Charles Harvey Fahs, Conspectus of Cooperative Missionary Enterprises, Clippings, Memorial Service Pamphlet, and Seminary Quarterly Bio, 1934 -- 1948 | box 1.1 | folder 10 |
| Charles Harvey Fahs Correspondence, 1933 -- 1934 | box 1.1 | folder 11 |
| Print of School Building with Children Playing, circa 1850 -- 1859 | box 1.1 | folder 12 |
| Charles Harvey Fahs, America's Stake in the Far East, 1920 | box 1.1 | folder 13 |
| Charles Harvey Fahs (ed), The Open Door: A Challenge to Missionary Advance, 1903 | box 1.1 | folder 14 |
| "Mrs. Sophia Fahs", 1966-12-05 | box 1.2 | |

Scope and Contents

1 reel titled "Mrs. Sophia Fahs" with comments by President Bennett, Mrs. Fahs, and Mrs. Hunter at a tea commemorating the publication of her biography written by Mrs. Hunter given by President and Mrs. Bennett.

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1942 -- 1981

Physical Description: 0.5 linear feet 0.5 linear feet; 1 box

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged roughly chronologically.

Scope and Contents

This series contains Sophia Lyon Fahs' correspondence with her biographer Edith Hunter as well as other general correspondence.

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|---|-----------|------------|
| SLF Correspondence with Biographer Edith Hunter, 1947 -- 1960 | box 2.1 | folder 1-7 |
| Edith Hunter Donation Acknowledgment, 1981 | box 2.1 | folder 7 |
| Other Correspondence, 1942 -- 1970 | box 2.1 | folder 8 |

Letter from SLF's Children Announcing SLF's Death, 1978 box 2.1 folder 9

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Series 3: Riverside Church Sunday School, 1925 -- 1982

Physical Description: 0.5 linear feet 0.5 linear feet; 1 box

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is unarranged.

Scope and Contents

This series contains Riverside Church Sunday School papers and religious education publications, and writings by Riverside's Rev. C. Ivar Hellstrom.

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Correspondence from DFB, Riverside Church School Worship Service, 1935 -- 1978 | box 3.1 | folder 1 |
| Megaphone-Riverside Church School Weekly Newsletter, 1947 -- 1949 | box 3.1 | folder 2 |
| Ivar Hellstrom, Curriculum for Church School; Reports on Religious Education, 1925 -- 1927 | box 3.1 | folder 3 |
| Emily F. Ellis, Journal Notes from Riverside Church Bible Class and donation letter; Parents Magazine article, 1938 -- 1982 | box 3.1 | folder 4 |
| Religious Education Serials, 1933 -- 1956 | box 3.1 | folder 5-7 |
| Scope and Contents | | |
| Including Childrens Religion, Pilgrim Elementary Teacher, Church Monthly | | |
| Articles by Edith Hunter, 1950 -- 1954 | box 3.1 | folder 8 |

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Series 4: Dorothy Fahs Beck papers, 1906 -- 1987

Physical Description: 1.5 linear feet 1.5 linear feet; 3 boxes

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged roughly chronologically.

Scope and Contents

This series contains materials donated by Dorothy Beck Fahs, including articles about SLF, memorials, and correspondence, as well as drafts and correspondence related to Cobb and Dorothy Fahs' work on *Old Tales for a New Day* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1981), the companion volume to Sophia Fahs' earlier books on mythic stories for children.

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|---|------------------|-------------|
| Writings by SLF, 1906 -- 1966 | box 4.1 | folder 1 |
| Memorials and Articles about SLF, 1942 -- 1978 | box 4.1 | folder 2 |
| Correspondence from Dorothy Fahs Beck, 1976 -- 1977 | box 4.1 | folder 3 |
| SLF-Guide for Teachers Using Jesus: Carpenter's Son, 1945 | box 4.1 | folder 4 |
| Weekly Records of Experiences as Teacher of Fourth Grade, Junior Dept. Riverside Church School, Part 1-2, 1933 -- 1934 | box 4.1 | folder 5-8 |
| Weekly Records of Experiences as Teacher of Fourth Grade Junior Department, Riverside Church School, Part 1A-2B, 1933 -- 1934 | box 4.2 | folder 1-4 |
| Report of Summer Experiment at Church of the Master, Harlem, by Alice Cobb, 1939 | box 4.2 | folder 5 |
| Exploring Religion with Nine- and Ten-Year-Olds at Riverside Church School by Alice Cobb, 1981 | box 4.2 | folder 6 |
| Notes Re: SLF/Cobb Myth Book, circa 1970 -- 1979 | box 4.3 | folder 1 |
| Correspondence Re SLF/Cobb Book, 1978 -- 1979 | box 4.3 | folder 2 |
| Myth Book Expenses, 1978 -- 1979 | box 4.3 | folder 3 |
| DFB's Beacon Press Correspondence, Clippings, 1975 -- 1978 | box 4.3 | folder 4 |
| DFB Correspondence Rev. Edna Bruner and DFB, 1978 -- 1979 | box 4.3 | folder 5 |
| DFB Correspondence Alice Cobb and DFB, Drafts of Myths Chapters, 1976 -- 1979 | box 4.3 | folder 6 |
| DFB Correspondence with Barthold Fles Literary Agency, 1976 -- 1977 | box 4.3 | folder 7 |
| Publishers Contacts and DFB Correspondence Re: Myth Book, 1975 -- 1977 | box 4.3 | folder 8 |
| SLF/Cobb Copyright Permissions Correspondence, 1980 -- 1981 | box 4.3 | folder 9-12 |

Alice Cobb Yes, Lord, I'll Do It-Scarritt's Century of Service, box 4.3 folder 13
1987

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