

**The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary,
Columbia University in the City of New York**

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

William Walker Rockwell Papers, 1895-1988



Alice zur Cann Boscowitz (artist). Image from: Busby, C. *About Face: Portraits at Union Theological Seminary* (New York: Institute for Art, Religion, & Social Justice, 2012), 45.

Finding Aid prepared by Andrew McLaren, June 2017

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Summary Information

Creator: William Walker Rockwell, 1874-1958
Title: William Walker Rockwell Papers, 1895-1988
Inclusive dates: 1895–1988
Bulk dates: 1915–1942
Abstract: Professor and librarian at Union Theological Seminary. Congregationalist and church historian. Collection contains papers and materials relating to Rockwell's teaching, research, and library careers.
Size: 5 boxes, 1.75 linear feet
Storage: Onsite storage
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Email: burkespecial@library.columbia.edu

Administrative Information

Provenance: The William Walker Rockwell papers were among a large group of unprocessed material that was organized in 2017 with financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. There is no accession document for these papers, but they were gathered at the Burke Library as part of larger effort to preserve Rockwell's papers. In his second roll book (Series 1A, Box 2, Folder 2), Rockwell himself wrote, "Note made Nov. 19, 1949. I have an earlier Grade Book, running through 1914-15. In case of my death, please ask the Librarian of the Union Theological Seminary to preserve this volume in its library. W.W.R." There is also a letter (Series 1A, Box 2, Folder 3) dated 14 December 1988 from then-Burke Library director Richard D. Speer, thanking the librarian at the Midwest Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO for sending some of Rockwell's papers to the Burke.

Access: Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to burkearchives@library.columbia.edu, or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.

Restrictions: The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.

Preferred Citation: Item description, UTS: William Walker Rockwell Papers, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

William Walker Rockwell served as professor and librarian at Union Theological Seminary from 1905 to 1942. Born October 4, 1874 in Pittsfield, MA, he was educated at Harvard College (A.B., 1895) and Andover Theological Seminary (S.T.B., 1900). After finishing at Andover, he spent the years 1900-1904 (the first two as a foreign fellow for Andover) studying at the universities of Marburg (S.T.L., 1903) and Berlin. In 1914, he received a Ph.D. from the philosophical faculty of the University of Göttingen, where he studied during seminary vacations.

After being ordained by the Congregational Council on June 5, 1905, in Andover, MA, and teaching in a number of temporary capacities, he was named assistant professor of church history at Union Theological Seminary, a post he held until 1917, where he was among the first non-Presbyterian faculty members. During this time, he also

served as acting librarian at Union (1908-1913). He was also a member of the faculty of political science at Columbia University from 1912 on. From 1917 to 1925, he continued as associate professor of Church History at Union. In 1925, he was named head librarian, a position he held until he officially retired in 1942. The Burke Library expanded considerably under his tenure, including the addition of the Missionary Research Library. Rockwell was also librarian when Julia Pettee, responsible for devising a new system of book classification for theological collections, was hired in June 1909.

He was an active member of the American Society for Church History, serving both as secretary (1911-1917) and as president (1926), and a chairman of the National Congregational Commission on International Relations. In 1930, Rockwell was awarded an honorary doctorate in theology from the University of Marburg.

Rockwell died May 30, 1958, aged 83.

Sources:

Alumni Catalogue of the Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1836-1936. (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1937), xix.

Handy, Robert T. *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), *passim*.

The Harvard Graduates' Magazine 38 (1929-1930), 145.

"In Memoriam: William Walker Rockwell." *Church History* 27 (1958), 371.

Slavens, Thomas P. *A Great Library through Gifts* (New York: K. G. Saur, 1986), 195-209, 236 – 269.

Collection Scope and Content Note

This collection is primarily composed of papers from William Walker Rockwell's teaching career at Union Theological Seminary, including the two roll books that cover his entire teaching career (1895-1942), as well as some lecture materials and student papers from his courses. Of particular note is the grouping of papers dealing with a class entitled "Congregational History and Polity," which deals particularly with the history of American Congregational churches, the church in which Rockwell was ordained in 1905 and one of Rockwell's research specialties in his academic career. Also included in the collection are assorted documents and correspondences from his time as head librarian at the Burke Library, especially from his second tenure (1925-1942). The papers include a small amount of biographical material, newspaper clippings about his own life and the lives of his family, as well as other ephemera, like his 1930 honorary doctorate of theology from the University of Marburg. There are a small number of papers (Subseries 2B) of uncertain provenance, which seem to be mostly manuscript fragments and letters.

The collection is organized in two series:

- **Series 1: Teaching and Professional Files, 1895-1942 (3 boxes, 1 lin. ft.)**
This series contains two distinct bodies of material. The first (subseries 1A) is

composed primarily of papers and correspondences from Rockwell's time as a UTS faculty member. The second (subseries 1B) is general correspondence from the last few years of Rockwell's tenure as librarian, only some of which is written by or addressed to him.

- **Subseries 1A: Course Materials and Academic Correspondence, 1906-1939 (2 boxes, .75 lin. ft.)**

This series contains a variety of teaching materials from Rockwell's entire teaching career, including two roll books of student grades, various teaching records and materials, and student papers and notes. Also included in this series is Rockwell's professional and academic correspondence from his time as professor at Union. The roll books include various handwritten annotations made by Rockwell, noting some biographical details. Of particular interest is a short autobiographical note written by Rockwell circa 1954 on p. 95 of the second roll book (1915-1942) and the diploma for his 1930 honorary doctorate from Marburg. This subseries also includes some obituary notices and letters about Rockwell after his death. The folder-level groupings largely preserve existing organization in a number of different boxes.
- **Subseries 1B: Burke Library Correspondence, 1939-1942 (1 box, .25 lin. ft.)**

This short subseries of two folders includes a series of correspondences relating to book acquisition and other library matters. It is set off as a subseries because of the varying provenance of the materials. Some of these are written by him; some are addressed to Rockwell as librarian; and some concern the affairs of the Burke in the last years before Rockwell's retirement but are written by and addressed to others.
- **Series 2: Ephemera, 1895-1977 (2 boxes, .75 lin. ft.)**

This series includes two distinct groupings of materials that did not fit comfortably into the first series: various reading notes and newspaper clippings organized by subject material by Rockwell between 1895 and 1923; and a collection of papers which appear to be largely unrelated to Rockwell himself.

 - **Subseries 2A: Clippings, 1895-1923 (1 box, .5 lin. ft.)**

This subseries includes reading notes, newspaper clippings, and various ephemera collected by Rockwell. Most of them seem to deal with news items about the Catholic Church in America and the Papacy.
 - **Subseries 2B: Manuscripts (1 box, .25 lin. ft.)**

This subseries contains papers of inexact provenance. Included are the following: (1) Correspondence to C.R. Gillett about the NYU Alumni Electorate, dated December 1909; (2) an undated etching of Union Theological Seminary pasted on plain paper; (3) a photocopy of correspondence to the UTS library, dated September 1885, regarding the

American Biblical Revision, signed by Philip Schaff (d. 1893); (4) a photographic reproduction of an autograph letter of Irish-born freethinker John Toland (d. 1722) dated March 1702; (5) an undated autograph letter of the Moravian Bishop Nikolaus Zinzendorf (d. 1760); (5) an undated autograph letter from Cardinal Bartolomeo Pacca (d. 1844), apparently written at Genoa; (6) an undated slip of paper (approx. 18cm x 8cm), containing a fragment of a sermon or religious letter written in English; (7) an undated slip of paper (approx. 13cm x 9.5cm) written in cursive Latin, perhaps from the late medieval or early modern period, perhaps from northern Europe. Given that Rockwell was a librarian for so long and was known for collecting manuscripts abroad, it is possible that these various fragments are things he collected along the way, but this is speculation.

Processing

Metal clips were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. Acidic items were separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed. Any items in an advanced state of deterioration were placed in Mylar envelopes.

Further Sources

A good deal of Rockwell's papers are held in other collections, including at the New York Public Library, which houses many of the papers dealing with Rockwell's international interests, and in the William Adams Brown Ecumenical Archives Group, which includes material on Rockwell's involvement with the Congregational Church.

[William Walker Rockwell Papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.](#)

[William Adams Brown Ecumenical Archives: William Walker Rockwell Papers. The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.](#)

Contents list

Series 1: Teaching and Professional Files, 1895-1942

Subseries 1A: Course Materials and Academic Correspondence, 1906-1939

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1A	1	1	Professional correspondence, 1906-1925
1A	1	2	Course materials, 1913-1917
1A	1	3	Course materials, 1918-1928
		1A 1 4	Notes on the Hitchcock Prize essay, 1900-1928
1A	1	5	Course materials and professional correspondence, 1926-1942
1A	1	6	Correspondence with and reports to faculty and administration, 1912-1942
1A	1	7	Correspondence regarding church affairs and recommendation letters, 1936-1941
1A	1	8	Course materials: Congregational History and Polity, 1907-1930
1A	1	9	Course materials: Congregational History and Polity, 1916-1927
		1A 1 10	Course materials: Congregational History and Polity, 1926-1935
		1A 1 11	Course materials: Congregational History and Polity, 1927-1939
		1A 2 1	Roll book, 1895-1915
		1A 2 2	Roll book, 1915-1942 (includes assorted loose papers)
		1A 2 3	Biographical materials, 1913-1988

Series 1: Teaching and Professional Files, 1895-1942

Subseries 1B: Burke Library Correspondence

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1B	1	1	Burke Library correspondence, 1939-1940
1B	1	2	Burke Library correspondence, 1941-1942

Series 2: Ephemera, 1895-1923

Subseries 2A: Clippings, 1895-1923

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
2A	1	1	Clippings, 1895-1923
2A	1	2	Ephemera and clippings 1903-1915
2A	1	3	Clippings -- Catholic Church, 1915-1920
2A	1	4	Clippings -- Christian Controversy, 1916
2A	1	5	Ephemera -- Congregational Church, 1910-1916
2A	1	6	Clippings, 1910-1920
2A	1	7	Clippings and ephemera, 1907-1921
2A	1	8	Clippings and ephemera, 1921-1923

Subseries 2B: Manuscripts, Undated

2B 1 1 Assorted manuscript fragments and correspondence