



Ella Victoria Dobbs Papers (C0095)

Collection Number: C0095

Collection Title: Ella Victoria Dobbs

Dates: 1882-1961

Creator: Dobbs, Ella Victoria, 1866-1952

Abstract: The papers of Ella Victoria Dobbs, University of Missouri Professor Emeritus of Applied Arts and founder of Pi Lambda Theta includes correspondence; speeches; articles; a published biography; classroom notebooks; clippings; manuscript material from an incomplete book, *The Creative Arts in Democratic Living*; and Pi Lambda Theta records.

Collection Size: 0.8 cubic feet
(55 folders)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at columbia@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Ella Victoria Dobbs Papers* (C0095); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Columbia].

Donor Information: The papers were donated to the University of Missouri by the University of Missouri, Department of Art on February 1, 1950 (Accession No. CA3065). An addition was made on May 21, 1952 by Jessie A. Charters (Accession No. CA3130). Further additions on May 24, 1965 (Accession No. CA3618) by Nancy C. Prewitt; and on August 17, 1990 (Accession No. CA4974) by Virginia J. Sinclair.

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Historical Note:

Ella Victoria Dobbs was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on June 11, 1866, to Edward O'Hail and Jane Jackson Forsythe Dobbs. After her mother's death in 1874, a stepsister Mary Rebecca Forsythe raised Dobbs and her older sister Jane.

By 1885 Dobbs had earned a primary school teaching certificate and began her teaching career in a one-room rural school in Silver Ridge, Nebraska. She was called home to Iowa the following year due to the death of her sister Jane. She began teaching at the Pine Bluff School in Rock Island County, Illinois, that summer, but a bout of tuberculosis forced her to return home once again. Dobbs was finally sent to live with her friend Lillian Throop, a schoolteacher residing in Utah.

After recovering from tuberculosis, Dobbs taught school in Salina, Utah. Later she taught at a mission school in Hyrum. When Throop moved to Logan, Dobbs went with her, contracting to teach first grade in the public schools.

In 1895 Dobbs obtained a teaching position in Pasadena, California. She enrolled in the Throop Polytechnic Institute shortly after her arrival and studied *sloyd* (manual arts). She graduated five years later in 1900. Dobbs became a faculty member at Throop in 1902. She left the following year to head the manual arts program in Helena Montana. By 1904 she returned to teaching at Throop Institute where she remained until 1907, when she entered Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York City.

Upon graduation in 1909, Dobbs was hired by the University of Missouri as an instructor in the Manual Arts Department. When the department was restructured and retitled Applied Arts in 1924, Dobbs was named its first chair. She was awarded the title "Professor Emeritus of Applied Arts" upon her retirement in 1936. Early in her university career Dobbs' basic goals were (1) the greater use of activities in the primary school, (2) to close the gap between kindergarten and primary school, and (3) the cultivation of a professional attitude among women teachers. In 1915 Dobbs was a key person in the founding of the National Council of Primary Education, an organization with educational goals similar to her own.

In 1910 Dobbs became the leader in the formation of Pi Lambda Theta, an honor society promoting professionalism among women teachers. This organization, finally realized in 1911,

later became Alpha Chapter of Pi Lambda Theta. Dobbs continued to serve Pi Lambda Theta after it emerged as a national organization in 1917. In 1923 the organization named a scholarship for advanced students in her honor.

Dobbs belonged to numerous clubs, societies, and organizations throughout her life. She was an advocate of women's suffrage and author of several important and innovative texts in the field of manual arts and on the value of handwork in art education. She died after a long illness on 13 April 1952, at the age of eighty-six.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following six series:

Correspondence
Biography
Notebooks
Manuscripts
Articles and Speeches
Miscellaneous

Scope and Content Note:

The Dobbs Papers consist of correspondence, speeches, articles, a published biography, classroom notebooks, clippings, manuscripts for *The Arts in Democratic Living*, Pi Lambda Theta records, and miscellaneous material. These papers represent a very small part of Dobbs' personal and professional life. The correspondence, though varied, is limited to a short span of years. There are few materials (beyond the biography) covering Dobbs' community and state activities, her involvement in the suffrage movement, or her membership and leadership in various civic and professional organizations. The manuscripts, articles and speeches provide a glimpse of both her writing style and her educational theories and practice. The papers are arranged into six sections: **Correspondence; Biography; Notebooks; Manuscripts; Articles and Speeches; and Miscellaneous.**

The **Correspondence** section consists of personal letters from friends and former students on the topics of teaching, art, and Pi Lambda Theta. The small amount of professional correspondence is primarily concerned with Pi Lambda Theta.

The **Biography** section consists of *Ella Victoria Dobbs: a Portrait Biography* written by Verna Mary Wulfekammer, University of Missouri associate professor of art, and published by Pi Lambda Theta. In the biography, Wulfekammer, Dobbs' former student and colleague, concentrates on Dobb's philosophy of life and teaching, her formative years, and her twenty-seven year teaching career at the University of Missouri.

The **Notebooks** section consists of four undated notebooks containing Dobbs' lecture notes on art, the philosophy of education, the teaching of manual arts, and the structure of wood. The fifth notebook, dated 29 March 1882, consists of poems and phrases collected by Dobbs' close friend, Lillian S. Throop.

The **Manuscripts** section consists of manuscript material for an incomplete book, *The Creative Arts in Democratic Living* and includes several draft revisions of various chapters and sections. The material includes a discussion of the character and purpose of physical creative activities, such as art and handcrafts; suggestions for organization and application of these activities to a variety of therapies and social situations; and the development of organizations and personnel for this work.

The **Articles and Speeches** section consists of typescripts, which address topics such as the value of self-expression and handwork in art education, women's clubs and parent- teacher associations in community life, wise use of leisure, and Pi Lambda Theta.

The **Miscellaneous** section consists of a tribute to Ella Victoria Dobbs upon her death in 1952; clippings; Pi Lambda Theta materials; and a 1929 pamphlet produced by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching explaining its bylaws, act of incorporation, letter of gift, and rules governing the admission of institutes and granting of retirement allowances.

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