



Ella Victoria Dobbs Papers (C0095)

Collection Number: C0095

Collection Title: Ella Victoria Dobbs Papers

Dates: 1882-1970

Creator: Dobbs, Ella Victoria, 1866-1952

Abstract: The papers of a University of Missouri Professor Emeritus of Applied Arts include correspondence, an unpublished manuscript, speeches and essays, and Pi Lambda Theta materials. It also contains teaching notebooks, scrapbooks, and a copy of her biography.

Collection Size: 1.10 cubic feet
(61 folders, 1 oversize item)

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.

Restrictions on Use: The donor has given and assigned to the University all rights of copyright, which the donor has in the Materials and in such of the Donor's works as may be found among any collections of Materials received by the University from others.

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 UMC Department of Art in February 1950 (Accession No. CA3065). Additions were made in May 1952 by Jessie Charters (Accession No. CA3130), in May 1965 by Nancy C. Prewitt (Accession No. CA3618), in August 1990 by Virginia J. Sinclair (Accession No. CA4974), and in May and July 1994 by Frances Kyllonen (Accession Nos. CA5431 and CA5445).

Processed by: Nancy Sandleback, 1987, with additions processed by Paula L. McNeill, 1993, and Aleksandra Kinlen 2023. Finding aid also revised by John Konzal in 2020.

Biographical 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), graduating in 1900 and becoming a faculty member there 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.

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 texts in the field of manual arts and on the value of handwork in art education. She died in 1952.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following eight series:

Correspondence
Biography
Notebooks
Manuscripts
Speeches and essays
Pi Lambda Theta
Miscellaneous
Oversize

Scope and Content Note:**Correspondence**

This series 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. Arranged chronologically.

Biography

This series includes the book *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 1961. 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.

Notebooks

This series contains a notebook, dated 1882, containing poems and phrases collected by Dobbs' close friend Lillian S. Throop as well as four undated notebooks containing Dobbs' lecture notes on art, the philosophy of education, the teaching of manual arts, and the structure of wood.

Manuscripts

This series holds manuscript material for an incomplete book titled "The Creative Arts in Democratic Living" and includes several drafts of various sections. The text includes a discussion of the character and purpose of physical creative activities, such as art and handicrafts; suggestions for the organization and application of these activities to a variety of therapies and social situations; and the development of organizations and personnel for this work.

Speeches and essays

This series includes typescripts addressing topics such as the value of self-expression and handwork in art education, women's clubs and parent-teacher associations in community life, the wise use of leisure, and Pi Lambda Theta. Arranged chronologically, though many are undated.

Pi Lambda Theta

This series holds materials relating to the University of Missouri's chapter of Pi Lambda Theta, including membership lists; information on rituals and the history of the organization; newsletters; a book of minutes covering 1910-1930; and a scrapbook presented to Dobbs in honor of her 25 years of service in 1934. Further, there is a 1945 photograph of members in f. 52.

Miscellaneous

This series contains an art appreciation course syllabus, photographs, tributes in honor of Dobbs after her death, and two scrapbooks. The "A Year in the Limelight" scrapbook (1924-1925) was compiled by Verna Wulfekammer and mainly includes recognition for Dobbs' publication of her book *Our Playhouse: An Industrial Reader* as well as notes about her other activities. The series

also holds a scrapbook entitled “My Eightieth Year,” which Dobbs added personal notes and clippings to throughout 1945.

Oversize

This series consists of a University of Missouri certificate awarding Dobbs the title of Professor Emeritus of Applied Arts in June 1939.

Container List:

| | |
|----------|---|
| f. 1-18 | Correspondence |
| f. 1-4 | 1921-1922 |
| f. 5-6 | 1923 |
| f. 7-10 | 1925-1927 |
| f. 11-14 | 1928 |
| f. 15 | 1929 |
| f. 16 | 1930-1933 |
| f. 17 | 1934-1940 |
| f. 18 | n.d. |
| f. 19 | Biography, 1961 |
| f. 20-24 | Notebooks |
| f. 20 | 1882 |
| f. 21-24 | n.d. |
| f. 25-38 | Manuscripts, “The Creative Arts in Democratic Living” |
| f. 39-50 | Articles and speeches |
| f. 39 | “Report on Work as Shown by Exhibits from Pacific Coast,” 1904; “The Significance of Handwork in Art Education,” 1916 |
| f. 40 | “The Future of the Association of Applied Arts and Science,” 1916 |
| f. 41 | “The Significance of Women’s Clubs and Parent Teacher Associations in Community Life,” 1927 |
| f. 42 | “Opening a Closed Door,” c. 1936 |
| f. 43 | “Now it Can be Told: A High Highlight,” c. 1936 |
| f. 44 | “A Vision,” n.d.; “The Cross,” n.d. |
| f. 45 | “Don’t Pull it Tight,” n.d. |
| f. 46 | “Chips and Shavings,” n.d. |
| f. 47 | “Handwork as a Medium for Self-Expression and Self-directed Activity,” n.d. |
| f. 48 | “Training for a Wise Use of Leisure,” n.d. |
| f. 49 | “Setting the Stage for Creative Activity,” n.d. |
| f. 50 | “Beginnings of Pi Lambda Theta,” n.d. |
| f. 51-55 | Pi Lambda Theta |
| f. 51 | 1910-1922 |
| f. 52 | 1945; n.d. |
| f. 53 | Minutes, 1910-1930 |
| f. 54-55 | Scrapbook, 1934 |
| f. 56-61 | Miscellaneous |
| f. 56 | Art appreciation syllabus, n.d. |
| f. 57 | Photographs, 1886-1895; n.d. |
| f. 58 | Tributes, 1952-1970; n.d. |

f. 59-60 "A Year in the Limelight" scrapbook, 1924-1925
 f. 61 "My Eightieth Year" scrapbook, 1945

Oversize

item 1 University of Missouri emeritus certificate, 1939

Index:

| Index Terms | Folder | Medium | Image |
|---|-----------------|--------|-------|
| Art--Study and teaching | 1-19, 21, 25-49 | | |
| Decorative arts | 1-19, 23, 25-49 | | |
| Dobbs, Ella Victoria, 1866-1952 | 1-61 | item 1 | |
| Dobbs, Ella Victoria, 1866-1952 | 52, 57 | | yes |
| Education--Societies, etc. | 1-19, 50-55 | | |
| Handicraft | 1-19, 21-49 | | |
| Hobbies | 25-38 | | |
| Industrial arts teachers | 1-19, 21-39 | | |
| Lectures and lecturing | 1-24 | | |
| Occupational therapy | 21-38 | | |
| Pi Lambda Theta. Alpha Chapter (University of Missouri) | 1-19, 50-55 | | |
| Pi Lambda Theta. Alpha Chapter (University of Missouri) | 52 | | yes |
| Poetry | 20 | | |
| Public speaking | 1-24 | | |
| Teachers--Training of | 1-19, 23, 25-39 | | |
| Teaching | 1-19, 23, 25-39 | | |
| Throop, Lillian S., 1879-1968 | 19, 20 | | |
| Throop, Lillian S., 1879-1968 | 57 | | yes |
| Women educators | 1-61 | | |
| Wulfekammer, Verna Mary, 1900-1994 | 19, 58-60 | | |