

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
RARE BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS DIVISION
ACCESSION SHEET

Accession # * 88M77

Location 6-h-5/6 (L)

Title Nelson, Charles Alexander, 1839-1933. Papers.

Approximate inclusive dates 1850s-1930s

Date of receipt 1937

Received from Mrs. Reinhard A. Wetzel

Volume on arrival

Number of boxes (after reboxing) 12 boxes, 5 linear ft.

Condition Good.

Restrictions

Description

Charles Alexander Nelson was a Reconstruction administrator in Newbern (or New Berne), Craven County, North Carolina for a decade following the Civil War, then returned to the North to spend the rest of his career as a librarian and bibliographer.

Nelson was born in Calais, Maine, and moved with his family to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1855. In 1864 he went to Newbern to serve as a civil engineer and draughtsman in the Quartermaster's department of the Army. Nelson remained in Newbern until 1874, serving there in a variety of public and private administrative posts. He was an acting superintendent of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; Chairman of the Board of [election] Registration; Cashier of the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Co.; Superintendent of Schools; Justice of the Peace; Notary Public; and editor of the New-Berne Daily Republican. He was active in Republican politics in Newbern, and was Secretary of the Ward One Grant and Colfax Club of the City of

Special Formats Photographs Maps Audio Tapes Films Graphics
 Artifacts Machine-readable records
 Other (list) _____

Temporary catalog card added entries

See attached

Accessioned by J. Miller

Date November 10, 1988

Newbern. In 1874 he became Director of the Shaw Institute for Colored Boys in Raleigh.

Nelson returned to Boston in 1875 where - except for 1877-1878, spent at Drury College, Springfield, Missouri, as a librarian and professor of Greek - he worked at the Estes and Lauriat and Old South bookstores. In 1881 Nelson moved to New York to serve as the compiler of the Astor Library's second catalog. This was published in 1886-1888 and in 1888 he went to New Orleans to work at the Howard Memorial Library, remaining there until 1891. Nelson spent 1891-1893 at the Newberry Library in Chicago, then returned to New York to work at the Columbia College Library until his retirement in 1909.

Nelson published a number of bibliographies, and a history of Waltham, Massachusetts. He was also an indexer of books - including Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes' Iconography of Manhattan Island - and organizational records. He contributed articles and notices to library and booktrade journals, newspapers, and encyclopedias, was a founding member, in 1876, of the American Library Association, and served as president and secretary of the New York Library Club. Nelson was active in Civil War veterans' associations and in Harvard alumni activities - he lived to be one of the last surviving members of the Class of 1860. Nelson was married to Emma Norris and they had two daughters. He died at age 94 at his home in Mount Vernon, New York.

Note: A group of letters written by Nelson's daughters while at college, the Gertrude Jane and Ruth Augusta Nelson Letters, 1891-1897, are held by the Cornell University Library, Department of Manuscripts and Archives.

DESCRIPTION

Nelson's papers, 1850s-1930s, consist primarily of correspondence. Manuscripts, legal and financial documents, reports, organizational records, scrapbooks, photographs, and printed material are also included. These document his years in Newbern, North Carolina at the end of the Civil War and for a decade afterwards, his later career as a librarian and bibliographer, and his involvement with library and bibliographic organizations.

Correspondence

Correspondence, chiefly letters received by Nelson with some drafts or copies of his letters, consists of general correspondence, 1859-1930s, two thirds of which (a) is in good chronological order while the rest (b) is in order only by decade; a group of letters dating from the 1880s-1890s organized alphabetically by correspondent (c); and a letterbook, 1870-1893 (d).

General correspondence includes correspondence between Nelson while in Newbern, and members of his family in Cambridge, Massachusetts; documents his activities in the posts held in Newbern; documents his work at the Astor, Howard Memorial, Newberry, and Columbia College libraries, and his work as a bibliographer, indexer, author of the Waltham book, and contributor to periodicals and encyclopedias. Nelson received letters from librarians around the country who wrote to consult him on indexing and cataloging questions, and from Harvard classmates whose letters, and Nelson's replies, provide interesting biographical information. A significant amount of New York Library Club correspondence is included here. Samuel Putnam Avery, R.R. Bowker, librarians Melvil Dewey and Harry L. Koopman, fine printers Frederic Goudy and William Edwin Rudge, and I.N. Phelps Stokes are among the frequent correspondents.

The alphabetical correspondence consists chiefly of letters received by Nelson and Frederic Saunders, 1880s, at the Astor Library in connection with their compilation of the Library's catalog. Many of these are responses from authors to Nelson and Saunders' requests for their complete names. 1890s correspondence in this file is on general topics.

The letterbook contains copies of Nelson's letters, 1870-1893, on personal and professional topics.

Newbern Papers

A group of papers from Nelson's years in Newbern consists of: additional correspondence, 1867-1876; legal documents accumulated by Nelson as a Justice of the Peace, 1867-1872; some financial records of the First Congregational Society of New Bern, 1865-1867; a small group of financial records, chiefly bills and receipts, documenting personal and professional expenses while in Newbern; a record book of the Ward One Grant and Colfax Club of the City of Newbern, 1868; and miscellaneous clippings, printed material, and photographs.

Howard Memorial Library Reports, 1889-1891

Manuscripts of Nelson's reports, as Librarian, to the Library Committee of the Howard Memorial Library, New Orleans.

Records of Organizations, 1880s-1890s

Correspondence, reports, minutes, and printed material of organizations to which Nelson belonged, including: the American Library Association (chiefly records, 1892-1893, of its World's Columbian Exposition Committee, of which Nelson was a member); the Bibliographical Society of America; New York Library Club, 1880s-early twentieth century; and the Twilight Club, a New York social club, 1886-1903. Additional records of these and other organizations can be found in the correspondence and printed material.

Writings

Manuscripts, proof, and notes of Nelson's Waltham, Past and Present...; proof of his Bibliography of Columbiana, 1754-1904; manuscript of his translation of the Vindiciae Typographicae, a book concerning Johann Gutenberg by Johann D. Schoepflein; manuscripts of essays and talks, and fragmentary writings and notes.

Personal and Miscellaneous

Included here are invitations received by Nelson, 1880s-1910s, chiefly from libraries and booktrade organizations; printed material documenting Harvard alumni activities and additional correspondence between Nelson and classmates, 1910s-1920s (a 1920 photograph of the Class of 1860 is included); printed material from Cambridge High School, 1850s; scrapbooks, two manuscript book catalogs, and printed and miscellaneous items.

A group of letters that may have been collected by Nelson for their autograph value include three to the publishers Gould and Lincoln from

John Dowling, November 15, 1856, Henry Jackson, November 13, 1865, and J. Newton Brown, March 20, 1857, all concerning a book, The Progress of Baptist Principles by a Professor Curtis. Four others, from Rev.F. Wayland, July 12, 1860, Judge Peleg Sprague, September 30, 1852, Cleveland Abbe, October 13, 1870, and C.A. Guillette (or Guilamatti), n.d., are unrelated. None are addressed to Nelson.

Nelson - Container list

Box

I. Correspondence, 1859-1930s

a. General

- 1 1859-1897
- 2 1897-1911
- 3 1911-1936, n.d.

b. General, by decade

- 4 1860s-1920s
- 5 1920s-1930s

c. 1880s-1890s

- 5 A - K
- 6 L - Z

- 6 d. Letterbook, 1870-1893

II. Newbern Papers, 1865-1876

- 6 Correspondence, 1867-1876 and n.d.; Justice of the Peace papers, 1867-1872; Congregational Society Records, 1865-1867.
- 7 Financial records; Grant and Colfax Club records, 1868; miscellaneous.

7 IV. Howard Memorial Library Reports, 1889-1891

V. Records of Organizations, 1880s-1900s

- 7 American Library Association, 1890s
- 8 Bibliographical Society of America; New York Library Club, 1880s-1900s; Twilight Club, 1886-1903

9 VI. Writings

VII. Personal and Miscellaneous

- 10 Invitations; Harvard Alumni activities; Cambridge High School; financial records; scrapbooks
- 11 Scrapbooks; catalogs; printed material
- 12 Printed material; miscellaneous ; autographs