

The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,
Union Theological Seminary, New York

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 2

Finding Aid for

Near East Relief Committee Records, 1904 – 1950



Letter, H. S. Meredith to Mrs. Talcott Williams, May 11, 1927.

Credit to MRL 2: Near East Relief Committee Records, series 2, box 7, folder 11,
The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

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Summary Information

Creator: Near East Relief Committee
Title: Near East Relief Committee Records
Inclusive dates: 1904-1950
Bulk dates: 1914-1917
Abstract: American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief established 1915 to respond to Armenian Genocide. Millions of dollars raised and distributed. Scope expanded after World War One, was incorporated through Act of Congress and renamed Near East Relief in 1919. Collection offers first-hand, detailed accounts of those in affected areas.
Size: 17 boxes, 1 OS box, 10.25 linear feet
Storage: Onsite storage
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Email: burkearchives@library.columbia.edu

Administrative Information

- Provenance:** Originally part of the independent Missionary Research Library, these records were moved with the MRL to the Brown Memorial Tower of Union Theological Seminary in 1929. In 1976 the records were accessioned to the Burke Library archives with the closure of the MRL.
- 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.
- Access 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, MRL 2: Near East Relief Committee Records, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

History

The American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR) was established in 1915 at the urging of America's ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, Sr. to respond to the Armenian Genocide. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire caused millions of Assyrians, Armenians, Greeks, and other minority groups to be displaced. Under the leadership of James L. Barton and Cleveland H. Dodge, the organization raised millions of dollars through public rallies, church collections, assistance from other charitable organizations and foundations. The funds were delivered through the American Embassy in Constantinople and distributed via missionaries and consuls.

After World War One, the committee widened its scope of activities to include Russian Armenia, where hundreds of thousands had taken refuge, and in 1919 became incorporated through a charter granted by the United States Congress. At this time it was renamed "Near East Relief" Committee (NER) and its directors were William Howard Taft, Charles Evans Hughes, and Elihu Root.

Between 1915 and 1930, NER administered \$117,000,000 of assistance, in addition to delivering food, clothing, and materials for shelter, and setting up refugee camps, clinics, hospitals, orphanages, and centers for vocational training. NER is credited with having cared for 132,000 Armenian orphans scattered across the region and eventually spent over ten times of its initial estimate in reaching close to two million refugees.

In 1930, NER was renamed the "Near East Foundation" (NEF) to reflect a shift in emphasis away from relief work to more sustained, long term development-oriented involvement in the region. At this time it was directed by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Allen Dulles. It became the primary U.S. relief agency for the near east region, and later served as the model for President Truman's Four-Point Program, USAID, and the Peace Corps. As of 2012, NEF still operates in

seven countries in Africa and the Middle East with a focus on empowering local communities to become agents of their own development.

Sources:

From this collection and the following:

Adalian Rouben P. "Near East Relief and the Armenian Genocide." *Armenian National Institute*.

<http://www.armenian-genocide.org/ner.html>

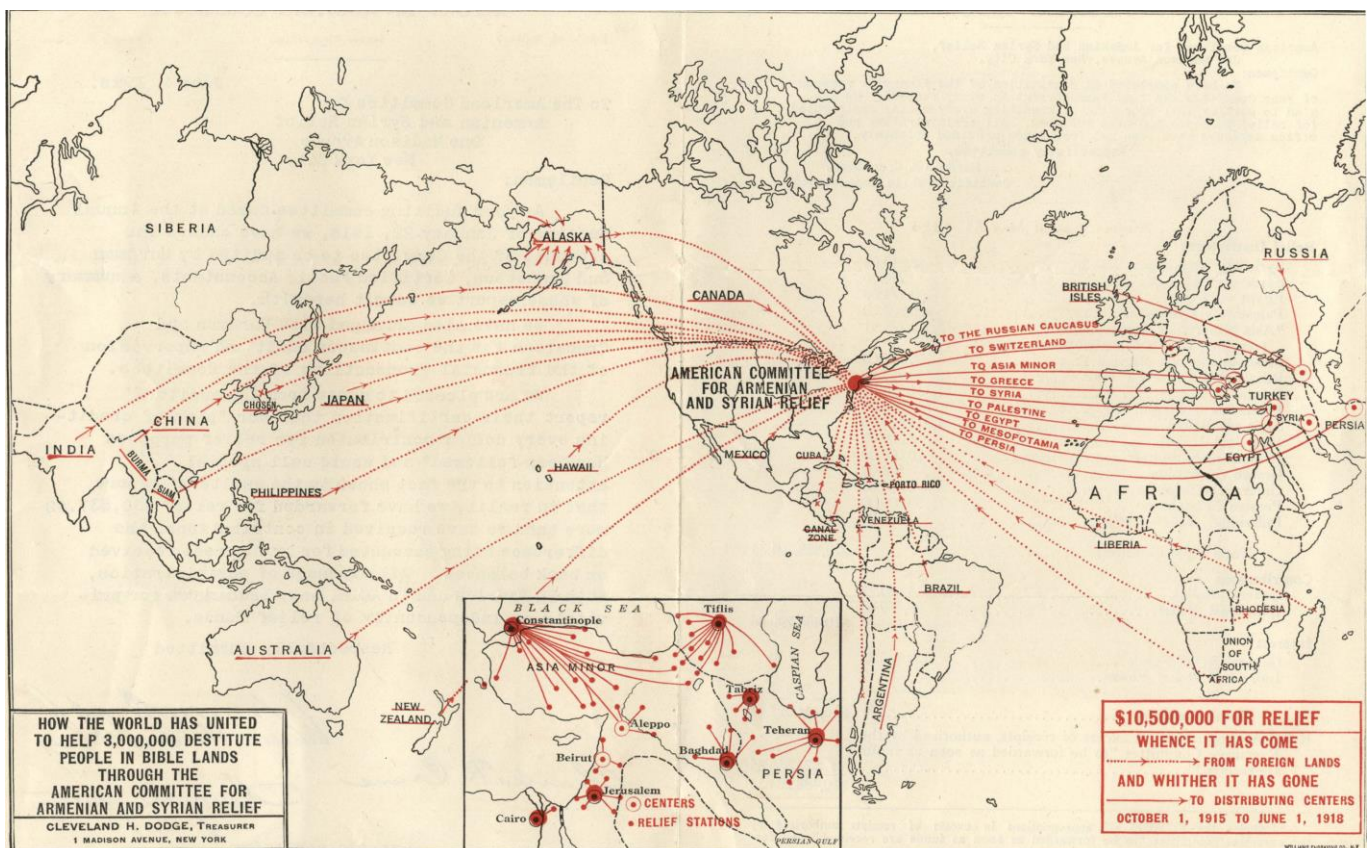
"American Committee for Relief in the Near East." *Encyclopedia Dubuque*. Last modified 13 April 2010. Accessed 7 January 2013

[http://www.encyclopediadubuque.org/index.php?title=](http://www.encyclopediadubuque.org/index.php?title=AMERICAN_COMMITTEE_FOR_RELIEF_IN_THE_NEAR_EAST)

[AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR RELIEF IN THE NEAR EAST](http://www.encyclopediadubuque.org/index.php?title=AMERICAN_COMMITTEE_FOR_RELIEF_IN_THE_NEAR_EAST)

"Who We Are: History." *Near East Foundation*. 2010. Accessed 7 Jan 2013.

<http://www.neareast.org/whoweare/history>



Map, 1918. Credit to MRL 2: Near East Relief Committee Records, series 1, box 5, folder 1-2, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The collection is organized in two series. The majority of material was collected by William Walker Rockwell and Talcott Williams.

William Walker Rockwell was a Congregationalist minister who was associate professor of church history and librarian of Union Theological Seminary from 1905 to 1942. Rockwell was an active member of Near East Relief who collected materials on behalf of the organization in

addition to composing several pamphlets to help gather public support for its cause. Rockwell's material comprises the earliest records in the collection.

Talcott Williams was the first director of the Columbia University Pulitzer School of Journalism. Williams was born in Turkey, the son of Congregational missionaries. Williams' father helped to establish Roberts College in Istanbul and the American College in Beirut.

- **Series 1: American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, 1904-1950 (6 boxes, 2.75 lin. ft.)**

This series includes correspondence, notes, articles, pamphlets, reports and source files related to the beginning of the organization and the specific needs and conditions of Armenia and Syria. The correspondence documents the experiences of those in war-torn areas and the need for aid.

The bulk of William Walker Rockwell's extensive correspondence is from 1911-1917. The letters go into detail regarding conditions in Armenia, such as deportations and poor treatment of individuals. Correspondence is from individuals and locations throughout the world, such as Germany and Switzerland. Rockwell also wrote to Ambassadors Henry Morgenthau and Abram I. Elkus, US Ambassadors to Turkey. Many of the documents contain copies of other material not directly related to the ACASR, such as other committees with related goals.

An example is a letter from Samuel Dutton of Constantinople College, dated October 1, 1915. Dutton explains that he added Rockwell to the Central Committee of Atrocities and includes a document explaining the committee's purpose. Notable members included Charles R. Crane, Cleveland H. Dodge, Stuart Dodge, Arthur Curtiss James, John R. Mott, and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. Another letter from an individual in Armenia states:

“At the second retirement from Van in July, the Armenian residents were bereft of all their possessions – houses, agricultural implements and domestic animals – at the same time having their homes burned up. In the very sense of the word 100,000 to 120,000 Armenians arrived at Etchmiadzin stripped even of their outer garments.” (Box 1 Series 1 Folder 4)

Other letters discuss the difficulty to get any information into the papers about events in Armenia. Rockwell's materials also include his own writings, such as for the pamphlet *The Pitiful Plight of the Assyrian Christians*, 1916.

The remainder of the series offers source files, also collected by Rockwell, on ACASR work and what other organizations, such as the Federal Council of Churches and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, were doing to help.

- **Series 2: Near East Relief, 1915-1936 (12 boxes, 7.50 lin. ft.)**

Series two contains records, much of which collected by Talcott Williams, which show the expanded mission of the organization. Records include bulletins, cablegrams and other correspondence, newspaper clippings, press releases and fundraising materials. Minutes

from committees as well as reports on topics such as education in orphanages and religious education are available. Notable members of the organization, such as Cleveland Dodge and Charles Vernon Vickrey, Executive Secretary of Near East Relief, are represented.

The plight of many displaced groups, such as Assyrians, Greeks and Armenians, is evident. For example, the NER received the following cablegram on February 23, 1922 from Athens, Greece, describing the conditions:

ATHENS

LCO NEAREAST NY

THE HEALTH SITUATION IN THE BIG REFUGEE CENTERS IS RAPIDLY ASSUMING THE STATUS OF A CATASTROPHE. THE DEATH RATE OF BABIES IN PIRAEUS IS NOW 180 PER DAY. THREE OF THE LARGEST CAMPS ARE UNDER QUARANTINE FOR SMALLPOX. SIX CASES OF BUBONIC PLAGUE HAVE BEEN ISOLATED AND THERE WERE TWO DEATHS FROM BUBONIC IN THE PAST TWENTYFOUR HOURS. OF THE SECRETARY GOUNARIS ONE/MOST PROMINENT POLITICAL FIGURES IN THE PRESENT SITUATION IN GREECE IS CRITICALLY ILL WITH TYPHUS. THE PERCENTAGE OF WINTER ILLNESS SUCH AS INFLUENZA AND PNEUMONIA AMONG WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS NOW EXCEEDS FIFTY PERCENT.

Credit to MRL 2: Near East Relief Committee Records, series 2, box 7, folder 4,
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The series offers a large number of Executive Committee dockets. A guiding principle was, "Every effort to be made to throw responsibility upon governments or by other methods to relieve private philanthropy of the burden of wholesale relief..." These records show aid extended to Armenia, Syria, Persia, Beirut, Greece and other locations in Asia Minor.

The series concludes with information from the Golden Rule Society, also collected and owned by Williams.

Processing

In 2009, student Rachel Long processed a portion of the Executive Committee minutes, which had been discovered as a small unprocessed collection. The majority of the current papers were combined after selection from the large group of unprocessed Mission Research Library archives. Order was imposed with an attempt to keep together materials collected by specific individuals in a chronological order, in order to show the growth and expansion of the organization.

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. Photocopies of fragile newspaper clippings have been produced.

Further Sources

The Rockefeller Archive Center in New York offers a large collection of Near East Foundation records, dealing mainly with their efforts after 1930. More information can be found online at: <http://www.rockarch.org/collections/nonrockorgs/neareast.php>.

The Burke Library offers other archival collections related to the Near East in MRL section 2. The American Constantinople Relief Committee Records, 1912-1914, and the Mary Lewis Shedd Papers may be of specific interest. These collections can be found on the archives website: <http://library.columbia.edu/indiv/burke/archives/mrl.html> or by contacting archives staff at archives@uts.columbia.edu.

Two further archival collections from William Walker Rockwell exist at The Burke: in the William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library Archives http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/libraries/burke/fa/wab/ldpd_4492712.pdf ; in the Union Theological Seminary Archives <http://library.columbia.edu/indiv/burke/archives/uts.html>.

In addition to these archival collections many Mission Research Library pamphlets relating to the Near East Relief Committee are available for researchers to consult by appointment. As each is separately catalogued, these can be found by searching [CLIO, the Columbia Libraries catalog](#).

Columbia University Libraries also offer collections relating to Talcott Williams. To find more information, please search the Archival Collections Portal through the Columbia online catalog: <http://archivesportal.cul.columbia.edu/>.

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| 1 | 1 | 6-7 | 1916-1917 |
| 1 | 1 | 8 | Ambassadors Morgenthau and Elkus: US Ambassadors to Turkey, 1916-1917 |
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