

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

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 6

Finding Aid for

William Edward Smith Diaries, 1897 - 1936



Image Credit: Edward Wilson Wallace, *The Heart of Sz-Chuan* (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1903), p. 44.

Finding Aid prepared by: Gregory Adam Scott, March 2010

Reviewed and Updated by Brigette C. Kamsler, February 2014 with financial support from the
Henry Luce Foundation

Summary Information

Creator: Rev. Dr. William Edward Smith 王為霖, 1864 - 1944
Title: William Edward Smith Diaries
Dates: 1897-1936
Abstract: Diaries and notebooks written by Dr. William Edward Smith while living in Sichuan, China as a medical missionary for the Canadian Methodist Mission, later known as the West China Mission. Includes correspondence and ephemera inserted in to diaries.
Size: 6 boxes, 2.75 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:** These records were part of the formerly independent Missionary Research Library prior to its closure in 1976, when the records were accessioned to the Burke Library.
- 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 6: William Edward Smith Diaries, box # and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography¹

William Edward Smith was born in Kendall, in what was then the Province of Canada in 1864. He attended Albert College in Belleville and later received his ministerial and medical degrees at the University of Toronto. In 1895 he married a longtime acquaintance and fellow missionary, Grace Olivia Young, and a year later they went to China as missionaries under the auspices of the Canadian Methodist (Episcopal) Mission 英美會.² The CMM was notable for establishing the Canadian Mission Press in Chengdu 成都 in 1905, which remained the only Christian press in China west of Hankou 漢口. Smith arrived in Shanghai on October 1, 1896.

In 1901 and 1902 Smith traveled to Rong County 榮縣 in Sichuan 四川, and in 1905 was appointed there when the CMM opened it as a new mission station. The mission obtained property in the northwest of the walled city, and in the following years opened a church and a boarding school, as well as the Junghsien (Rong County) General Hospital, completed in 1914. In May, 1922 he and his wife were appointed as delegates to the National Christian Conference of China. Later that year she died in Toronto, having been ill for many years. In 1927 Smith married Dr. Ada B. Speers of the Western Methodist Mission hospital in Chengdu.

In 1936 Smith retired from mission work and returned to Canada, where he wrote an account of his experiences entitled *The Canadian Doctor in West China: Forty Years under Three Flags* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1939). The book was compiled from material recorded in the diaries now preserved in this collection.³ He also served on the senate of Victoria College in Toronto and Albert College. He passed away in 1944, survived by his wife Dr. Ada B. Speers Smith, a son and two daughters.

¹ This information is based in part on Smith's obituary in *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, Vol. 50 (April, 1944): 392.

² In 1925 the CMM was merged with the United Church of Canada, and its field became the West China Mission.

³ See page ix of the preface to the book.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The bulk of the collection consists of diaries and notebooks written by Smith during his time in China. Several of the books contained ephemera inserted into the pages; these have been unfolded and are separately contained in folders. These inserts include correspondence, clippings, notes, and pamphlets.

While many of the diaries have long blank sections, the entries and notes detail his experience working as a missionary and a medical practitioner in west China.

Processing

Metal clips and staples 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.

In 2014, the collection and finding aid were updated as part of the Henry Luce Foundation grant.

Further Sources

The Burke Library contains other collections on missions in China that may be of interest to researchers. For more information, please see the Burke Archives website:

<http://library.columbia.edu/locations/burke/archives.html>.

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