

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

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 2

Finding Aid for

James Shepard Dennis Papers, 1873 – 1916

Finding Aid prepared by: Debbie Liu, February 2012
With financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

Summary Information

Creator: James Shepard Dennis, 1842 – 1914
Title: James Shepard Dennis Papers
Inclusive dates: 1873 – 1916
Bulk dates: 1905
Abstract: James Shepard Dennis was a missionary, historian, and statistician of missions. Served for four years as a missionary in Syria, primarily in Sidon and Zahleh, and was professor in the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Beirut from 1873 – 1891. Large number of letters involve reprint of volume three of *Christian Missions and Social Progress*, which studied the effects of Protestant missions on non-Protestant people. Collection includes papers, letters, photographs, and bound books.
Size: 1 box, 0.50 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: James Shepard Dennis Papers, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

James Shepard Dennis (December 15, 1842 - March 21, 1914) was a missionary, historian, and statistician of missions. After graduation from Princeton in 1863 followed by a year studying law at Harvard, Shepard entered Princeton Theological Seminary, where he graduated in 1867. In 1869, Shepard was ordained by the Presbytery of Newark. He then entered Syria as a missionary with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). A year into his service as a field missionary, the mission was transferred to the Presbyterian Church Board of Foreign Missions (PCBFM). Dennis joined this board and was connected to this board for the remainder of his life.

From 1873 to 1891 he was director of the theological school at Syrian Protestant College in Beirut. In 1883, after a professor delivered a commencement speech that was interpreted as paying tribute to Charles Darwin, Dennis drafted a religious manifesto called the Declaration of Principles in response. The college required all faculty members to sign. Several faculty resignations and student protests followed.

After his return to America, Shepard lived in New York City and Montclair, N.J., and began documenting the social effects of Protestant missions on non-Christian peoples. Aided by the correspondence from missionaries around the world, Shepard published the three volume work *Christian Missions and Social Progress*. This book is widely considered to be a great contribution to the science of missions and a valuable resource for missionary results.

Dennis then published *Centennial Survey of Christian Missions* (1902), which reported all Protestant missionary operations which were being maintained at the close of the nineteenth century. He demonstrated with descriptions and statistics, their conditions and achievements in various areas of work. James Dennis Shepard was honorary secretary of the Presbyterian Board from 1904 till his death in 1914.

Sources:

- Elshakry, Marwa. "The Gospel of Science and American Evangelism in Late Ottoman Beirut," in *American Missionaries and the Middle East: Foundational Encounters*, edited by Mehmet Ali Doğan and Heather J. Sharkey, 181-193. Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 2011.
- Strong, William E., ed., *The Story of The American Board*, 334, 338. Boston, Massachusetts: The Pilgrim Press, 1910.
- Grove Biography in Context*, s.v. "Dennis, James Shepard," <http://galegroup.com> (accessed February 20, 2012).

Collection Scope and Content Note

The collection includes correspondence to Dennis from missionaries around the world; locations include China, Korea, England, the United States, India, Japan, Turkey, Madagascar, Scotland, and Burma. All letters are from 1905 and are in response to a call by Dennis for updated information and images on missions which would be used in a reprint of *Christian Missions and Social Progress*. Also included with the correspondence are newspaper clippings and photographs. Some few letters indicate enclosed photographs, but those photographs are not present in this collection for unknown reasons.

There is a notebook documenting minutes of meetings of the Theological Seminary Committee of the Syrian Mission, 1873 – 1874, as well as a list of students of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Beyrout (Beirut), dated 1873 – 1890. Other items include an Address Book that contains a typed index of names categorized by country of residence; a Book of Particulars [Correspondence Log] noting letters sent and date; and a memorandum with additions in regards to a new edition of a publication whose title is not listed. A brief statement by Malbone Watson Graham is available in the collection detailing the circumstances which led to the publication of *Christian Missions and Social Progress* by Dennis.

Processing

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. Letters of more than one page or with attachments separated from others by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed. Photographs were placed in Mylar envelopes.

An item-level listing is available for use by researchers.

Further Sources

The main records of the ABCFM are held by the Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts and the following link is to the Finding Aid of that collection: <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~hou01467> Microfilms of various sections of the Houghton Library collection, most commonly of the earliest pre-1919 correspondence, can be found in many academic libraries. See Series: ABC 77: Biographical collection of ABCFM

Finding Aid at Houghton Library: series includes individual biographies originally prepared by ABCFM board archivist. Dennis biography can be found in box 19.

The Missionary Research Library at the Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary also offers a collection of [ABCFM records](#). Please contact the archives if you would like to see these records at burkearchives@library.columbia.edu.

Contents list

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1	1	Correspondence, A, 1905
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1	4	Correspondence, G – J, 1905
1	5	Correspondence, L – M, 1905
1	6	Correspondence, P – R, 1905
1	7	Correspondence, S, 1905
1	8	Correspondence, T – Y, 1905
1	9	Notebook, 1873 – 1890
1	10	Address Book
1	11	Book of Particulars [Correspondence Log], 1909
1	12	Origin of a Great Missionary Book - Statement by M. W. Graham, 1916