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Union Theological Seminary, New York

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Sr. Papers, 1880 – 1926



Artist unknown. Image from: Busby, Cathy. *About Face: Portraits at Union Theological Seminary*. (New York: The Institute for Art, Religion, & Social Justice, 2012), 35.

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Summary Information

Creator: Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Sr., 1861-1933
Title: Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Sr. Papers
Inclusive dates: 1882-1926
Bulk dates: 1915-1926
Abstract: Presbyterian/Congregational minister, church historian and UTS President (1917-1926). The collection consists of correspondence, sermons, addresses, personal and professional papers, and two photographs.
Size: 8 boxes, 3.75 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:** The papers are part of the Union Theological Seminary Archives, which comprises institutional and administrative records of the Seminary, combined with the papers of many organizations, scholars, pastors, laypersons, and others connected with the school. The materials in this collection were part of a large group of unprocessed material that was organized in 2015.
- 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, UTS 1: Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Sr. Papers, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

Arthur Cushman McGiffert was born in Sauquoit, New York on March 4, 1861 to the Rev. Joseph Nelson McGiffert and Harriet Whiting Cushman. Ordained first in the Presbyterian Church and, later, the Congregational Church, McGiffert distinguished himself as an academic, teaching and writing extensively on the subject of church history, and serving as the eighth president of Union Theological Seminary.

McGiffert married Eliza Isabelle King on June 9, 1885. Their union was brief as she died in 1887, but they had one daughter, Elizabeth McGiffert (later married Rev. Dwight F. Mowery). On November 12, 1891, McGiffert married Gertrude Huntington Boyce, with whom he had two more children, Arthur Cushman McGiffert and Katharine Wolcott McGiffert (later Mrs. John K. Wright).

McGiffert benefited from extensive education, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree and his first Master of Arts degree from Western Reserve University (later combined with Case Institute of Technology to form Case Western Reserve University) in 1882. He graduated from Union Theological Seminary in 1885 and went on to study abroad for a year at the University of Berlin. In 1886-1887, he studied at the University of Marburg with prominent theologian and church historian Carl Gustav Adolf von Harnack. In 1888, he received a Ph.D. from Marburg in connection with his doctoral dissertation, "Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew."

He was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in Cleveland, Ohio in 1888 and commenced his teaching career at Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio as an instructor and eventually professor in Church History from 1888-1890. McGiffert returned to Union Theological Seminary in 1893, where he taught Church History and eventually became the acting president

from 1916 to 1917 and served as president from 1917 until his retirement in 1926. His term as president coincided with the first world war and related challenges. Also during his tenure McGiffert encouraged the enrollment of students from other institutions (known as “special students”) and promoted the scholarly and professional aspects of theological education.

McGiffert later received a number of honorary degrees: the D.D. from Western Reserve University in 1892, Harvard University in 1906, Presbyterian Theological College (Halifax) in 1920, and the University of St. Andrews in 1922; and the LL.D. from Pennsylvania College (later Gettysburg College) in 1917 and Queen’s University (Halifax) in 1919. He later served in a governance capacity with respect to various academic institutions, such as a member of Western Reserve University’s board of trustees and a member of the Advisory Committee of the Harvard Endowment Fund. He took part in a large number of societies and associations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Philosophy Association, the Authors Club, the American Historical Society, and the American Church History Society.

He published a number of works during his career, such as a translation of Eusebius’ *Church History with Prolegomena and Notes* (1890), *A History of Christianity of in the Apostolic Age* (1897), *The Apostles’ Creed* (1902), *Protestant Thought Before Kant* (1911), *Martin Luther, the Man and His Work* (1911), *The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas* (1915), *The God of the Early Christians* (1924), and *A History of Christian Thought* (1933).

McGiffert’s publication of *A History of Christianity of in the Apostolic Age* in 1897 in the wake of the heresy trials of Charles Briggs ignited some controversy. In 1900, the Presbytery of New York brought heresy charges against McGiffert in connection with passages of his book that were claimed to show a lack of belief in biblical inerrancy. Although the Presbytery eventually voted to not bring him to trial, the affair caused McGiffert to enter the Congregational Church.

McGiffert died at his home in Dobbs Ferry, New York on February 25, 1933, and was survived by his widow and three children. His son, Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr., was a published author and teaching as professor of Christian Theology at the Chicago Theological Seminary at the time of his death. McGiffert is buried in Beacon, New York.

Sources:

Handy, Robert T. 1987. *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press.

"McGiffert, Arthur Cushman". 2009. In *Marquis Who Was Who in America 1607-1984*. New Providence: Marquis Who's Who LLC.

Union Theological Seminary. 1926. *Alumni Catalogue of the Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1836-1926*. New York: Union Theological Seminary.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The collection is organized in two series:

- **Series 1: Correspondence, 1913-1926 (5 boxes, 2.50 lin. ft.)**

This series contains substantial correspondence arranged in categories by the following thematic groupings: publications, lectures, addresses, invitations to speak, correspondence with certain institutions and individuals, and other professional and personal correspondence. The correspondence is arranged within these grouping alphabetically by name or title, as the case may be.

Some of the publications included in that grouping of correspondence (Folders 1-7) are: "God of the Early Christians," *Martin Luther, the Man and His Work*, and *The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas*. Some of the publishers included in that grouping of correspondence (Folders 8-15) are: The American Journal of Theology, The Christian Work, The Macmillan Company, and Charles Scribner's Sons. The correspondence in Box 5, folder 12 is related to McGiffert's summer property in West Falmouth, Massachusetts, as well as a boat and car used there. The correspondence in Box 5, Folder 13 relates to financial matters both personal, such as payment of income tax and investments, and UTS-related, such as payment for a new chapel window and messages seeking to improve telephone service for the president. The correspondence in Box 6, Folder 1 is connected to the McGriffert family and includes writings from family members such as Rev. Dwight F. Mowery, one of McGriffert's sons-in-law, and James H. McGriffert, a cousin of McGiffert and an attorney at the National City Bank in Cleveland, Ohio.

The bulk of correspondence is from the period of McGiffert's presidency at Union Theological Seminary (1917-1926).

- **Series 2: Writings, 1883-1925 (1 box, 0.25 lin. ft.)**

This series includes writings and notes of McGiffert with respect to various addresses, written pieces, and sermons. Known titles of writings are in quotation marks in the folder names.

- **Series 3: General, 1882-1921 (2 boxes, 1.00 lin. ft.)**

In this series are both small selections of earlier material such as a printed volume of McGiffert's Marburg Dissertation (*Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*) dedicated to the Rev. Phillip Schaff from 1889 and early notebooks. From later a scrapbook of news clippings of reviews of his work "A History of Christianity of in the Apostolic Age" and other notebooks are included.

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 and fragile bound volumes were wrapped in acid-free paper.

Further Sources

The Burke Library offers a number of other collections relating to Union Seminary and the individuals who interacted with McGiffert. For more information, please see the [Burke Library Archives website](#).

Contents list**Series 1: Correspondence, 1913-1926**

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	1-7	Publications, 1915-1926
1	1	8-15	Publishers, 1915-1926
1	1	16-18	Lectures, 1916-1925
1	1	19	Addresses, 1916-1923
			<u>Invitations</u>
1	2	1-2	Invitations to speak -- Churches/Religious Groups, 1915-1926
1	2	3-4	Invitations to speak -- Educational Institutions, 1916-1925
1	2	5	Invitations to speak -- Organizations, 1916-1923
1	2	6	Invitations to committee membership, 1916-1926
			<u>Institutions</u>
1	2	7-11	Institutions, 1916-1926
1	3	1	Institutions, 1916-1926
			<u>Individuals</u>
1	3	2	List of Individuals, 1913-1926
1	3	3	Individuals, A-B
1	3	4	Individuals, Francis Brown
1	3	5	Individuals, Edwin M. Buckley
1	3	6	Individuals, C-D
1	3	7	Individuals, S. Parkes Cadman
1	3	8	Individuals, J. Estlin Carpenter
1	3	9	Individuals, Edmund and Henry S. Coffin
1	3	10	Individuals, James A. Craig
1	3	11	Individuals, George William Douglas
1	3	12	Individuals, E-G
1	3	13	Individuals, Charles W. and Samuel E. Eliot
1	3	14	Individuals, Kemper Fullerton
1	3	15	Individuals, H
1	3	16	Individuals, J-L
1	3	17	Individuals, L.P. Jackson and F.J. Foakes Jackson
1	3	18	Individuals, William M. Kingsley
1	3	19	Individuals, Kirsopp Lake
1	4	1	Individuals, Harold Peirce
1	4	2	Individuals, M-N
1	4	3	Individuals, J.W. Platner, George W. Dwight Pratt, and other P
1	4	4	Individuals, Walter Rauschenbusch, William Ramsay, William W. Rockwell, G.A. Johnston Ross
1	4	5	Individuals, S

Series 1: Correspondence (Cont'd)

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	4	6	Individuals, T-V
1	4	7	Individuals, Henry Osborn Taylor
1	4	8	Individuals, Ambrose W. Vernon
1	4	9	Individuals, W-Z
1	4	10	Individuals, Other, A-N
1	4	11	Individuals, Other, O-Z
1	4	12	Individuals, Unidentified
<u>Subjects</u>			
1	4	13	List of correspondents
1	4	14	Election to UTS presidency, 1917-1918, A-D
1	4	15	Election to UTS presidency, 1917-1918, E-L
1	4	16	Election to UTS presidency, 1917-1918, M-R
1	4	17	Election to UTS presidency, 1917-1918, S-Y
1	4	18	Inauguration, 1918, A-M
1	4	19	Inauguration, 1918, P-W
1	4	20	Honors, 1916-1922
1	5	1	Organizational memberships, A-C
1	5	2	Organizational memberships, A-C
1	5	3	Organizational memberships, I-L
1	5	4	Organizational memberships, Manhattan Congregational Church
1	5	5	Organizational memberships, N
1	5	6	Organizational memberships, O-P
1	5	7	Organizational memberships, Religious Education Association
1	5	8	Organizational memberships, T-W
1	5	9	List of correspondents
1	5	10	Class reunions, 1915-1926
1	5	11	Travel, 1920-1926
1	5	12	West Falmouth, 1916-1926
1	5	13	Financial, 1916-1926
1	5	14	McGiffert Family, 1919-1924
1	5	15	Memorial and obituary materials, including photographs

Series 2: Writings, 1883-1925

2	1	1	Farewell address to graduating class, 1925
2	1	2	Memorial address, Western University
2	1	3	"Epic of the Themes"
2	1	4	"Literature and Life," Chi Alpha, 1906
2	1	5	"The Pastor and the Professor in Relation to Criticism," Chi Alpha, 1903
2	1	6	"Hospital Nurses"
2	1	7	Longfellow, First Congregational Church, 1883
2	1	8	Robert Burns

Series 2: Writings (Cont'd)

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
2	1	9	The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit, Auguste Sabatier
2	1	10	"The Temptation of a Young Clergyman"
2	1	11	What is There in Religion, Henry Sloane Coffin, 1923
2	1	12	"Appreciation of President Eliot" for The Christian Register, Boston
2	1	13	The Autobiography of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury
2	1	14	Notes, general

Series 3: General, 1882-1921

3	1	1	Memorabilia - programs, bibliography, 1918-1921
3	1	2	Rome diary, 1882-1887
3	1	3	Common-place book, 1883
3	1	4	[Hebrew word book]
3	1	5	Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew, 1889
3	2	1	Scrapbook of reviews of A History of Christianity of in the Apostolic Age