

**The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary
Columbia University in the City of New York**

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

Sophia Lyon Fahs Papers, 1903-1987



Credit: *Kairos*, Spring 1976

In S.L.Fahs Papers, 1903-1982, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 6,
The Burke Archives, Union Theological Seminary Records

Finding Aid prepared by: Alexis Waller 2009; updated Brigitte Kamsler, 2015; updated by Rebecca Nieto, 2017

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Summary Information

Creator: Sophia Lyon Fahs, 1876-1978
Title: Sophia Lyon Fahs Papers, 1903-1987
Inclusive dates: 1903-1982
Bulk dates: 1933-1978
Abstract: Unitarian educator, author, editor, minister, innovator in religious education of children, one of the first women faculty members at Union Theological Seminary, wife of Methodist minister Charles Harvey Fahs.
Size: 6 boxes, 3.00 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 papers constitute a constructed collection having its main sources in UTS alumni records and papers donated by Dorothy Fahs Beck in 1981 with subsequent accessions, and by Emily Ellis in 1982. Mary Hellstrom may have donated some papers earlier in the 1970s.
- 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:** UTS1: Sophia Lyon Fahs Papers, 1906-1986, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

Sophia Blanche Lyon Fahs (née Sophia Blanche Lyon) was born to Presbyterian missionaries in China on August 2, 1876 and died on April 14, 1978 in Hamilton, OH.

The Lyon family returned from China when Sophia Lyon Fahs was three years old and raised their family of seven children in Wisconsin and Ohio. In 1897, SLF received her A.B. cum laude from College of Wooster, OH. Two years later she met Charles Harvey Fahs at a Christian Mission Conference, and they married in 1902. They moved to New York City soon afterwards, and Sophia Fahs was offered a scholarship to do her master's work at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she worked with Rev. Frank McMurry, head of the Elementary Education Department.

It was at Teachers College, she recollected in 1966, "that I found out what I wanted to do in life, beyond being a wife and a mother—and that was to help in reconstructing the processes and the contents of the religious education of children in the light of mankind's growing understandings."¹ McMurry encouraged the initiation of an experimental Sunday School program that would inspire Sophia Lyon Fahs' further educational work: they pioneered the use of contemporary history and extra-Biblical material in Sunday School education, and her master's thesis, "The Use of Missionary Biographies in Religious Education," resulted from this experience. She finished her MA in 1904, and, a year later, she and Harvey Fahs had their first child.

Sophia Lyon Fahs' curiosity about the development of children's religious experiences informed her rearing of her five children, the Sunday School classes she taught in New York and New Jersey, teachers' study groups she led in Community Training Schools, and her directorship of

¹ From SLF's address on December 5, 1966 to friends and colleagues gathered at the home of UTS President John C. Bennett to celebrate the publication of Edith Hunter's biography. (See SLF Papers, Series 4, Box 4, Folder 1)

religious education at the Methodist Church of Leonia, NJ. According to her granddaughter Brenda Beck, Sophia wanted “to be able to look the minister straight in the eye” when explaining her ideas about religious education. So she enrolled at Union Theological Seminary and graduated with a B.D. in 1926. In 1927, Sophia Lyon Fahs and Mary Ely Lyman were the first women to be appointed to Union’s faculty. Fahs would remain at Union until 1944 as a lecturer in Religious Education.

From 1933 until 1942, she also began supervising and teaching in the Sunday School at the newly built Riverside Church. Rev. C. Ivar Hellstrom, Riverside’s Minister of Education, had graduated from Union in 1917 and had been a lecturer at the seminary in religious education between 1926 and 1928. At Riverside, Sophia met and taught with Emily Ellis, Mary Hellstrom, and Alice Cobb, whose donations partly comprise this collection. Much of Sophia’s later writing drew on her experiences with those Riverside Church School classes.

She was hired in 1936 by the American Unitarian Association as the editor of the New Beacon Press Series in Religious Education. Between 1936 and 1951, she wrote or co-wrote at least twenty books for the series. In 1951, Sophia Lyon Fahs transitioned to curriculum consultant, a position she held until she was 88 years old. At the age of 82, in 1959, she was ordained a minister in the Unitarian church.

Her published works include:

Missionary Biography in the Sunday School. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906.

Uganda’s White Man of Work: A Story of Alexander M. Mackay. New York: Eaton & Mains, 1907.

Sophia Lyon Fahs and Dorothy T. Spoerl. *Beginnings of Earth and Sky: Stories of Old and New*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1937.

Jesus, The Carpenter’s Son. Boston: Beacon Press, 1945.

Leading Children in Worship: Ten Services with Themes Related to Nature. Boston: Beacon Press, 1947.

Worshipping Together With Questioning Minds. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.

Sophia Lyon Fahs and Alice Cobb. *Old Tales for a New Day*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1981

Collection Scope and Content Note

This collection is organized in 5 series and contains correspondence (including correspondence between S L Fahs (SLF) and her biographer, correspondence concerning her religious teaching at Riverside Church’s Sunday School, her daughter Dorothy Fahs Beck’s (DFB) correspondence, reports from Sunday School classes, religious education publications, memorials, her Union Theological Seminary alumni file, and an intimate biographical essay written by her seventeen-year-old granddaughter Brenda Beck.

Series 5 consists of papers donated by her daughter Dorothy in 1981, containing materials from 1933-1987, much of which refers to the manuscript for the book on mythology that Alice Cobb co-wrote with SLF and finished after Sophia Lyon Fahs’ death.

The papers of Presbyterian missionary David Willard Lyon (1870-1949), SLF's father, can be found in the Burke Theological Library Archives at Union Theological Seminary:

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_4492589/index.html

- **Series 1: General and Alumni Files, 1903-1981 (1 box, 0.50 lin. ft.)**
This series contains a combination of papers from Sophia Lyon Fahs' UTS Alumni File as well as her personal files, including materials related to her husband Charles Fahs' writings.
- **Series 2: Correspondence, 1942 - 1982 (1 box, 0.50 lin. ft.)**
This series primarily consists of Sophia Lyon Fahs' correspondence with her biographer Edith Hunter, donated to the UTS Burke Library archives by Hunter in 1981, but includes some general correspondence.
- **Series 3: Riverside Church Sunday School, 1906 - 1982 (1 box, 0.50 lin. ft.)**
This series consists of Riverside Church Sunday School papers and religious education publications, and writings by Riverside's Rev. C. Ivar Hellstrom. These papers were donated by Emily Ellis in 1982, and possibly also by Mary Hellstrom earlier in the 1970s.
- **Series 4: Dorothy Fahs Beck Donation, 1975 - 1987 (3 boxes, 1.50 lin. ft.)**
The papers in this series were donated by DFB in 1981, with subsequent further accessions. It includes articles about SLF written during her lifetime, memorials, and correspondence. Towards the end of her life, SLF imagined a third volume would follow two of her earlier books on mythic stories for children in theme and educational purpose. After SLF's death in 1978, Cobb began to prepare this manuscript, under DFB's guidance. This series also contains DFB's correspondence with publishers, with Cobb and with others related to the project, requests for permission rights, and some of Cobb's drafts. This book was eventually published as *Old Tales for a New Day* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1981).

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 photocopied on acid-free paper and/or separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed.

Contents list**Series 1: General and Alumni Files, 1903-1981**

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	1	Correspondence, Writings by SLF, Ordination Service Pamphlet and Address, 1906-1970
1	1	2	Articles about SLF, Clippings, 1942-78
1	1	3	Liberal Religious Education Director's Association Lectureship Correspondence and Address by DFB, 1973-74
1	1	4	Riverside Church Ministers/UTS copied Correspondence on SLF's Teaching Controversy, 1936
1	1	5	Alumni File, 1923-67, includes. SLF's Reminiscences and Concerns, 1966
1	1	6	Alumni File News Clipping, <i>Kairos</i> , Spring 1976
1	1	7	Group Class Photo, [including D. W. Lyon?], [191?]
1	1	8	Sophia Fahs and Three Sunday Schools on Morningside Heights, by UTS student Ruthmary Pollack, 1982
1	1	9	Religious Education Academic Papers by Charles Young, 1951; by Robert C. Brown, 1981
1	1	10	Charles Harvey Fahs, Conspectus of Cooperative Missionary Enterprises, Clippings, Memorial Service Pamphlet, and Seminary Quarterly Bio, 1934-1948
1	1	11	Charles Harvey Fahs Correspondence, 1933-1934
1	1	12	Print of School Building with Children Playing, [185?]
1	1	13	Book: Charles Harvey Fahs, <i>America's Stake in the Far East</i> (New York: Association Press, 1920)
1	1	14	Book: Charles Harvey Fahs (ed), <i>The Open Door: A Challenge to Missionary Advance</i> (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1903)

Series 2: Correspondence, 1942 - 1982

2	1	1-7	SLF Correspondence with Biographer Edith Hunter, 1947-1960
2	1	7	Edith Hunter Donation Acknowledgment, 1981
2	1	8	Other Correspondence, 1942-1970
2	1	9	Letter from SLF's Children Announcing SLF's Death, 1978

Series 3: Riverside Church Sunday School, 1906 - 1982**Mary Hellstrom Donation**

3	1	1	Correspondence from DFB, Riverside Church School Worship Service, 1935-1978
3	1	2	Megaphone-Riverside Church School Weekly Newsletter, 1947-1949
3	1	3	Ivar Hellstrom, Curriculum for Church School, [19??] Reports on Religious Education, 1925-1927
3	1	4	Emily F. Ellis, Journal Notes from Riverside Church Bible Class, 1938 <i>Parents Magazine</i> article, 1960; Letter Acknowledging Ellis' Archives Donation, 1982

Series 3: Riverside Church Sunday School (Cont'd)

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
3	1	5	Religious Education Serials, Including <i>Childrens Religion</i> , 1946-1956
3	1	6	Religious Education Serials, Including <i>Pilgrim Elementary Teacher</i> , 1938
3	1	7	Religious Education Serials, Including <i>Pilgrim Elementary Teacher</i> , 1934-1936; <i>Church Monthly</i> , 1933
3	1	8	Articles by Edith Hunter, 1950-1951, 1954

Series 4: Dorothy Fahs Beck Papers, 1975 – 1987

4	1	1	Writings by SLF, 1906-66
4	1	2	Memorials and Articles about SLF, 1942-1978
4	1	3	Correspondence from Dorothy Fahs Beck (DFB), 1976-1977
4	1	4	SLF-Guide for Teachers Using Jesus: Carpenter's Son, 1945
4	1	5-8	Weekly Records of Experiences as Teacher of Fourth Grade, Junior Dept. Riverside Church School, Part 1-2, 1933-1934
4	2	1-4	Original Copy- Weekly Records of Experiences as Teacher of Fourth Grade Junior Department, Riverside Church School, Part 1A-2B, 1933-1934
4	2	5	Report of Summer Experiment at Church of the Master, Harlem, by Alice Cobb, July-August, 1939
4	2	6	Exploring Religion with Nine- and Ten-Year-Olds at Riverside Church School by Alice Cobb, 1981
4	3	1	Notes Re: SLF/Cobb Myth Book [197?]
4	3	2	Correspondence Re SLF/Cobb Book, 1978-1979
4	3	3	Myth Book Expenses, 1978-1979
4	3	4	DFB's Beacon Press Correspondence, Clippings, 1975-1978
4	3	5	DFB Correspondence Rev. Edna Bruner and DFB, 1978-1979
4	3	6	DFB Correspondence Alice Cobb and DFB, Drafts of Myth ms Chapters, 1976-1979
4	3	7	DFB Correspondence with Barthold Fles Literary Agency, 1976-1977
4	3	8	Publishers Contacts and DFB Correspondence Re: Myth Book, 1975-1977
4	3	9-12	SLF/Cobb Copyright Permissions Correspondence, 1980-1981
4	3	13	Alice Cobb Yes, Lord, I'll Do It-Scarritt's Century of Service, 1987