

PROVIDENCE PUBLIC LIBRARY
Special Collections
015-02-02
William Eaton Foster Papers
1877-1930

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Number: 015-02-02

Title: William Eaton Foster Papers

Creator: Foster, William E. (William Eaton), 1851-1930

Dates: 1877-1930

Quantity: 2 boxes (2 linear feet)

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition: Gift of estate of William Eaton Foster, 1930.

Accruals: No accruals are expected.

Custodial history: Material was acquired upon death of creator.

Processed by: Unknown. Finding aid updated by Kate Wells in 2018.

Conservation: Not applicable.

Language: Materials are in English.

RIGHTS AND ACCESS

Access: This collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Providence Public Library, Special Collections department.

Preferred Citation: Researchers are requested to use the following citation format:
[item title], William Eaton Foster Papers, Special Collections, Providence Public Library

Property Rights: Copyright has been assigned to Providence Public Library.

INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS

Separated material Published items were separated from the collection and cataloged separately.

Published description Not applicable.

Location of originals	Not applicable.
Location of copies	Not applicable.
Publication note	Not applicable.
Subject headings	Library directors. Public libraries. Providence Public Library (R.I.)

SEE ALSO

015-02-01 Providence Public Library records

015-03-01 Providence Public Library photographs

Published works authored by Foster are included in the library catalog as individual monographs.

HISTORICAL NOTE

William Eaton Foster (1851-1930) was the first Librarian of the Providence Public Library. He was born on June 2, 1851 in Brattleboro, Vermont to Joseph Coggin Foster and Abigail Eaton Foster. He received both his BA and MA from Brown University in 1873 and 1876 respectively. Foster attended the "Convention of Librarians" held October 4-6, 1876 at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania which marked the birth of the American Library Association.

In 1877, Foster accepted as position as Librarian of the new Providence Public Library where he served as the Library Director until his retirement in 1930. During his tenure, he was responsible for the expansion of the library's buildings and collections as well as several innovations in library service. He selected, classified and catalogued the library's initial 10,000 volume collection at its first location in the Butler Exchange building in downtown Providence. He oversaw the move of the library twice including into its current location at 125 Washington Street which opened on March 15, 1900.

Foster was an innovator who believed firmly in library service. The Providence Public Library was among the first to feature separate services points including an information desk, a reference desk and reference room. He also introduced an children's department, art department, music Division, and foreign department to serve the needs of the growing community. Under Foster's direction, the Providence Public Library grew to include departments for special collections, architecture, Civil War, printing; adult education as well as a standard library and business branch. Foster also actively collected library materials with varying points of view and encouraged patrons to suggest books to be purchased. The library grew to include not only the central library, but a library system including 12 branches and over 100 miscellaneous agencies. The library collection grew from just 10,000 volumes to 400,000 with nearly 90,000 registered patrons. Foster continued to improve library service by lecturing new library trainees at the New York State Library School. As a writer and speaker, Foster actively promoted the importance of public

libraries and specifically the work of PPL. In addition to writing numerous newspaper articles, he published several books related to librarianship and history.

Foster retired in February 1930 after serving as Librarian at PPL for 53 years. His dedication to library service was rewarded with numerous honors including an Honorary Litt.D from Brown University in 1901, an honorary membership to the Rhode Island School of Design in 1930, and the title "Librarian Emeritus for life" by PPL trustees. Foster died on September 10, 1930 after a long illness. He was survived by his wife of 44 years, Julia Appleton Foster.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

This collection includes materials about William Eaton Foster as well as the history of the Providence Public Library. The bulk of the collection contains his personal and professional papers during his tenure as Librarian at the Providence Public Library. Included as manuscripts of speeches and addresses, books and articles as well as published work. Also included is personal and professional correspondence with Foster's peers and professional associates with the bulk of letters being to Mr. Clarence Sherman, Associate Librarian at the Providence Public Library, while Foster was on vacation. Other correspondence concerns Foster's publications and other literary works as well as Foster's anniversaries, retirements, memorials and estate matters. Library historians may want to note that Foster was personally acquainted with the earliest members of the American Library Association and this collection includes personal letters written to Foster from R.R. Bowker. Materials created after Foster's death, including acknowledgments and honors for his work, are also included.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

The William Eaton Foster papers consists of four series: writings and speeches; correspondence; Commemorations, Memorials and Estate; Miscellaneous materials.

Series I, writings and speeches contains three subseries: speeches and address, manuscripts and bound publications. Each subseries is arranged chronologically.

Series II contains professional correspondence related to Foster's work at the PPL and publications.

Series III contains commemorations for Foster's work.

Series IV contains miscellaneous materials.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION**Series 1: Writings and speeches****Subseries 1.1: Speeches and Addresses**

Contains manuscripts, both handwritten and typed, of speeches and addresses written and delivered by William Eaton Foster. Items are arranged chronologically.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
<i>The Companionship of Books</i> Manuscript address delivered before the Young People's Association of St. Michael's Parish, Bristol, RI; revised and partially rewritten and delivered before the Lonsdale Library Association, Lonsdale, RI; Condensed and partially added to, and delivered before the Young Ladies' Improvement Society of the First Baptist Church, Providence, RI	1883-03-29; 1885-02-03; 1887- 03-25	1	1
<i>Qualities of Homer</i> Manuscript address read before the Greek Club	1887-11-19	1	2
<i>The Rhode Charter of 1663</i> Manuscript address read before the Rhode Island Historical Society	1888-11-13	1	3
<i>The Greek Mind as reflected in the Greek Drama</i> Manuscript address read before the Greek Club	1889-02-02	1	4
<i>Constitutional Pamphleteering</i> Manuscript read before the Historical Group	1889-12-21	1	5
<i>Constitutional Interpretation</i> Manuscript read before the Historical Group	1890-02-15	1	6
<i>The Dramatic Art of Sophocles</i> Manuscript address read before the Greek Club	1890	1	7
<i>Book and Reading</i> Manuscript address read before the "Women's Educational and Industrial Union"; Also read before Rogers High School Alumni Association, Newport, R.I	1889; 1890-02-17	1	8
<i>Rhode Island boundary disputes</i> Manuscript address read before the Rhode Island Historical Society	1891-02-10	1	9

<i>How the Revolutionary movement was helped on in Rhode Island</i> Manuscript address at Old South lecture series	1891-02-14	1	10
<i>Some especially practicable lines of reading and studying</i> Address before Providence High School Debating Society	1891-03-18	1	11
<i>Sons of the American Revolution, 1892</i> Manuscript address read before the Rhode Island Society of the Sons of the American Revolution	1892	1	12
<i>The Modern Scientific Method, as foreshadowed by Aristotle</i> Manuscript address read before the Greek Club	1892-02-27	1	13
<i>Alcaeus and Horace</i> Typed manuscript address with hand annotations, read before the Review Club	1895-02-02	1	14
<i>Developing a Taste for Good Literature</i> Manuscript address	1896-10-30	1	15
<i>Rhode Island's Participation in the New England Campaigns of 1775-1781</i> Manuscript address read before the Rhode Island Society of the Sons of the American Revolution	1893-06-24	1	16
<i>Providence Public Library</i> Manuscript address read before the Unitarian Club	1899-01-09	1	17
<i>Address at Library Opening</i> Typed manuscript address with handwritten corrections	1900-03-15	1	18
<i>Address to the Apprentices' Association</i> Manuscript address read before Brown & Sharpe Manufacturing Company	1901-04-19	1	19
<i>Report on the Cooperation of the School and the Library</i> Typed manuscript address presented to Barnard Club	1901-05-11	1	20
<i>Paul's "Matthew Arnold"</i> Manuscript address read before the Review Club	1902/1903	1	21
<i>Treatment of Little Used Books</i> Manuscript address read at ALA Niagara Conference; printed in Library Journal, v.28.	1903-06-25	1	22

<i>Essentials of a Library Report</i> Typed manuscript outline with handwritten annotations read at the ALA Niagara Conference; printed in Library Journal, v. 28	1906-06-25	1	23
<i>Libraries and their Opportunities</i> Manuscript address with annotations read at staff meeting	1904-02	1	24
<i>Where Ought the Emphasis be placed in Library Purchases?</i> Manuscript address read before Massachusetts Library Club	1904-04-12	1	25
<i>The Point of View in History</i> Manuscript address read before the Review Club	1906	1	26
<i>Renaissance Tendencies Today</i> Manuscript address read before the Review Club	1907	1	27
<i>The Public Library and Nature Study</i> Manuscript address	c. 1910	1	28
<i>Books for Children</i> Manuscript address read at Beneficent Congregational Church	1911-02-11	1	29
<i>Aims and Scope of the Providence Public Library</i> Manuscript address	c. 1912	1	30
<i>What is the Providence Public Library?</i> Manuscript address read before staff	1912-10-01	1	31
<i>Reference work</i> Manuscript address read at Rhode Island Normal School	1913-01-14	1	32
<i>The Greek Genius Restudied</i> Manuscript address read before the Review Club	1913-03-08	1	33
<i>Days out of Doors in the English Country</i> Manuscript address with annotations read at staff meeting	1913-10-28	1	34
<i>An Adventure in Biography</i> Manuscript address read before the staff and the Review Club	1914-10-27; 1915-06-30	1	35

<i>The Evaluation of Books</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1914	1	36
<i>Some Interesting Associations Connected with the Library Site and it's Neighborhood</i> Manuscript address read before library staff, note various title changes	1915-10-16	1	37
<i>Human Nature in War Time</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1916-11-29	1	38
<i>A White Mountain Valley and its Associations</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1918-12-3	1	39
<i>Readings in the Dictionary</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1919-11-25	1	40
<i>Education Through Leadership</i> Manuscript address to Staff Association	1920	1	41
<i>The Second Reading</i> Manuscript address to Staff Association	1921-01-13	1	42
<i>Some Architectural Sidelights</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1922-05-30	1	43
<i>Quotation, and near-quotation</i> Manuscript address read before library staff and the Review Club	1924-05-30; 1925-01-10	1	44
<i>Literary Landmarks Near Home</i> Manuscript address read before the Rhode Island Library Association	1926-10-29	1	45
<i>Thomas Davidson - The Wandering Scholar</i> Manuscript address read before the Review Club	1926-11-20	1	46
<i>Librarian's Tour of the Town</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1927-06	1	47
<i>The Reading of Books for Enjoyment</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1927-10-26	1	48
<i>Barsetshire Revisited</i> Manuscript address and maps presented to Review Club and library staff	1927-11-19	1	49
<i>A Choice of Cyclopedias</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1928	1	50

<i>Maximum Usefulness of Public Libraries</i> Manuscript address read before library staff	1928-10-03	1	51
<i>Address at opening of Tockwotten Branch</i> Manuscript address	1928-11-30	1	52
<i>John Keats and the books about him</i> Manuscript address read at PPL Book Talks	1928-12-31	1	53
<i>Stephen Hopkins House</i> Manuscript address with annotations read at the Rhode Island Historical Society	1929-01-15	1	54
<i>Books on Rhode Island</i> Manuscript address read to library staff	1929-04-02	1	55
<i>John Keats and his later fame</i> Manuscript address and appendices by Dr. H.L. Koopman, read before the Review Club	1930-03-15	1	56

Subseries 1.2: Manuscripts

Contains manuscripts of published materials by William Eaton Foster. The manuscripts are arranged chronologically.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
<i>John Adams and the Revolution</i> published in <i>The Nation</i>	1884-04-17	2	1
<i>American Studies</i> published in the <i>Providence Journal</i>	1889	2	2
<i>Some Rhode Island Men of Science in the Last Century</i>	1891-06-09	2	3
<i>Books about Books</i> published in <i>The Nation</i>	1891-08-27	2	4
<i>Point of View in History</i> published in <i>The Nation</i>	1891-08-27	2	5
<i>ALA paper "History"</i> published in <i>Colonial Society of Massachusetts Publications</i> , vol. 10; <i>Transactions</i> , 1904-1906; Boston, published by The Society, 1907	1904-1906	2	6

<i>Literary Memories of Newport</i> published in Newport Herald	1915-06-18	2	7
<i>Dreamer - services data</i>	1927-09-18	2	8
"Stephen Hopkins", Dictionary of American Biography	n.d.	2	9
<i>Books by Thomas Davidson</i>	n.d.	2	10
<i>Barsetshire Revisited</i>	n.d.	2	11
<i>Some Architectural Highlights</i>	n.d.	2	12
<i>Bibliographical Dictionaries</i>	n.d.	2	13

Subseries 1.3: Bound publications

Contains bound volumes of articles written by Foster. Volumes are arranged chronologically.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
Volume 1	1881-1892	2	14
Volume 2	1896-1926, undated	2	15

Series 2: Correspondence

Series includes correspondence related to Foster's professional responsibilities, work anniversaries, death and memorial, his literary work, and other miscellaneous letters.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
Correspondence with Clarence E. Sherman, Assistant Librarian of PPL	1924, July-August	2	16
Correspondence with Clarence E. Sherman, Assistant Librarian of PPL	1926, June-October	2	17
Correspondence regarding 35th Anniversary	1913	2	18

Correspondence regarding 50th Anniversary	1926-1927	2	19
Correspondence regarding 50th Anniversary	1926-1927	2	20
Correspondence regarding retirement	1930	2	21
Correspondence regarding honors	1925-1930	2	22
Correspondence regarding memorials	1930	2	23
Correspondence regarding estate of William Eaton Foster	1936-1940	2	24
Correspondence regarding Literary Four/Five Men of '76	1926-1929	2	25
Correspondence regarding publishing	1904-1910, 1922, 1927	2	26
Incoming correspondence	1897-1930	2	27
Correspondence regarding Richard Rum pamphlet	1914	2	28
Canon Wordsworth	1927	2	29
Thank you letters	1930	2	30
Outgoing correspondence	1878-1930	2	31

Series 3: Anniversaries, Commemorations, Memorials

Containing information regarding planned commemorations and memorials for Foster. Items are arranged chronologically.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
Anniversaries	1913	2	32
Retirement	1930	2	33
Memorials	1930	2	34

Series 4: Miscellaneous

Series includes primarily clippings and research materials collected by Foster.

Title	Date	Box	Folder
"The Homing" by Caroline Hazard (New York: Harbor Press, 1929) with personal note from author	1929	2	35
Providence Journal clippings	1913	2	36
Clippings related to publications	1915-1925	2	37
Clippings related to anniversaries, retirement and memorials	1913-1931	2	38
Research materials	1916-1928	2	39
Research materials	1891-1930	2	40