

# Guide to the John Luther Dickson Papers

RG 333



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2024

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<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Yale Divinity Library  
409 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511  
(203) 432-5301  
divinity.library@yale.edu  
<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

**CALL NUMBER:** RG 333

**CREATOR:** Dickson, John Luther (1873-1952)

**TITLE:** John Luther Dickson Papers

**DATES:** 1882–2019

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 2 linear feet (5 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English (Latin script)

**SUMMARY:** This collection contains materials relating to John Luther Dickson's radio ministry in the Chicago area—the WMAQ "Midday Chimes," which evolved into the Chicago Tribune-supported WGN "Midday Service"—providing insight into the use of radio technology for religious purposes in the twentieth century. Collected schedules, speeches, listener letters, and writings provide an overview of the program's run and its reach throughout the Chicago area and across the Midwest.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.333>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.333>.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Ronald Dickson Ball, 2023.

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Preferred Citation

John Luther Dickson Papers (RG 333), Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

John Luther Dickson (1873-1952) grew up in Illinois, where he spent his lifetime serving in Methodist churches. In 1896 he married Nellie May Clingman (1876-1936), a resident of Cedarville, Illinois, who attended the nearby Rockford College. Nellie and John briefly lived in the Northeast while John attended Yale Divinity School, receiving a B.D. in 1908 and an M.A. in 1910. Together they had four children.

For ten years, from 1930-1940, Dickson ran a radio ministry, the WMAQ "Midday Chimes," which evolved into the Chicago Tribune-supported WGN "Midday Service." The services were broadcast live six days a week (except Sunday), lasted for a half hour, and included hymns, poetry (often written by Dickson), and messages from prominent Christian and Jewish religious leaders. In John Luther Dickson's words, "it is not a "service" in any ecclesiastical sense, but a friendly presentation of religion broadly conceived." Dickson's radio work was an attempt to leverage technology to meet the needs of a modern city, carving out a "spiritual breathing space" in Chicago. At the beginning of the ministry, he stated with great hope, "no discovery or invention of modern times seems destined to exert a greater influence on the progress of civilization and culture than the radio."

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## Scope and Contents

From 1930-1940, John Luther Dickson ran a religious radio ministry broadcasted across the Chicago metropolitan area. The WMAQ "Midday Chimes," later the Chicago Tribune-supported WGN "Midday Service" hosted prominent Christian and Jewish religious leaders from across the United States. This collection contains materials relating to the broadcasts—including transcripts, speeches, and listener letters—and correspondence and gathered materials relating to John Luther Dickson and his wife, Nellie May Clingman.

Series I, Radio ministry, contains programmatic materials from the broadcasts organized chronologically, including speeches and schedules for the "Midday Chimes" and "Midday Service" and letters from listeners across the Chicago metropolitan area. The series provides insight into the structure, content, and reception of the broadcasts.

Series II, Writings, includes essays by John Luther Dickson and substantial handwritten and undated poems most likely read by Dickson on radio broadcasts.

Series III, Personal correspondence, contains letters from the beginning of Nellie and John's relationship as well as from relatives across the Midwest.

Series IV, Biographical documentation, contains ephemera dating from throughout the lives of Nellie May Clingman and John Luther Dickson as well as papers written and gathered by their grandson, Ronald Dickson Ball, on family history and genealogy.

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## Arrangement

### Arrangement

- I Radio ministry, 1929 - 1946
- II Writings, 1926 - 1944, n.d.
- III Personal correspondence, 1894 - 1947
- IV Biographical documentation, 1882 - 2011

## Collection Contents

### Series I: Radio ministry, 1929–1946

Introductory/administrative materials		
b. 1, f. 1	Organizational writings Writings concerning the United Ministry, the organization of the "Chimes" radio service, and the transition into the WGN "Mid-day Service."	1929–1933, n.d.
b. 1, f. 2	Pamphlets and ephemera related to WGN and the United Ministry	1930–1931, n.d.
b. 1, f. 3	Record of speakers	1931–1935
b. 1, f. 4	Notes and writings	1932–1940
Materials from the "Chimes" and "Mid-day Service" Containing speeches, writings, weekly schedules, and correspondence from programs and related to the radio ministry.		
b. 1, f. 5	Program materials	1930
b. 1, f. 6	Program materials	1931
b. 1, f. 7	Program materials	1932
b. 1, f. 8	Program materials	1933 January– 1933 March
b. 1, f. 9	Program materials	1933 March– 1933 November
b. 1, f. 10	Program materials	1934
b. 1, f. 11	Program materials	1935
b. 1, f. 12	Program materials Including "The Religion of Jesus" by Rabbi Gerson B. Levi.	1936
b. 1, f. 13	For "Religion on the Air Lanes" feature of the Chicago Defender	1936
b. 1, f. 14	Program materials	1937
b. 1, f. 15	Program materials	1938
b. 1, f. 16	Program materials	1939
b. 2, f. 1	Program materials	1940
b. 2, f. 2	Writings for "Mid-day Service" by John Luther Dickson	n.d.
b. 2, f. 3	Program materials and writings by others for "Mid-day Service"	n.d.
Correspondence		
b. 2, f. 4	Letters from listeners	1931–1936
b. 2, f. 5	Letters from listeners	1937

## Correspondence (continued)

b. 2, f. 6	Letters from listeners	1938
b. 2, f. 7	Letters from listeners	1939
b. 2, f. 8	Letters from listeners	1940, n.d.
b. 2, f. 9	Regarding the end and status of the radio program	1939–1946

**Series II: Writings, 1926–1944, n.d.**

By John Luther Dickson

Many undated writings and poems contained in this subseries were most likely used for the radio ministry.

b. 2, f. 10	Essays Including writing for the Yale Review, 1926, "The Scholarly Ideal in the Christian Ministry," and a sermon, 1920s?.	1926, n.d.
b. 2, f. 11	Essays on education, American government, and notes	1927, n.d.
b. 2, f. 12	On the American Farm Forum Including "American Farmers and World Markets," n.d.	1920s?
b. 2, f. 13	From early radio ministry	Circa 1930–1931
b. 3, f. 1	"Religion and the Radio" and a typical Mid-day Service transcript	1936?
b. 3, f. 2	On religion, WGN, and the United Ministry	1930s
b. 3, f. 3	Typed poetry	n.d.
b. 3, f. 4	Christmas poetry	1930s
b. 3, f. 5	Handwritten poetry and writings	n.d.
b. 3, f. 6	Handwritten poetry and writings	n.d.
b. 3, f. 7	Handwritten poetry and writings	n.d.
b. 3, f. 8	Handwritten poetry and writings	n.d.
b. 3, f. 9	Handwritten poetry and writings	n.d.
b. 3, f. 10	Handwritten poetry and writings	n.d.
b. 3, f. 11	Handwritten poetry and writings	n.d.
b. 4, f. 1	Handwritten poetry and writings	n.d.
By others		
b. 4, f. 2	Essays and materials from the American Schoolmaster Short Course	1927
b. 4, f. 3	National Vespers radio addresses by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick	1944
b. 4, f. 4	Miscellaneous writings and clippings	n.d.

**Series III: Personal correspondence, 1894–1947**

b. 4, f. 5	Nellie May Clingman and John Luther Dickson	1894–1895
b. 4, f. 6	Nellie May Clingman and John Luther Dickson	1896 January– 1896 April
b. 4, f. 7	Nellie May Clingman and John Luther Dickson	1896 May–1896 July
b. 4, f. 8	Nellie May Clingman and John Luther Dickson	1896 August– 1896 October
b. 4, f. 9	Nellie May Clingman and John Luther Dickson	1897, n.d.
b. 4, f. 10	Family correspondence	1885–1891
b. 4, f. 11	Family correspondence	1893 January– 1893 April
b. 4, f. 12	Family correspondence	1893 May–1893 November
b. 4, f. 13	Family correspondence	1894 January– 1894 February
b. 4, f. 14	Family correspondence	1894 March– 1894 November
b. 4, f. 15	Family correspondence	1896 January– 1896 June
b. 4, f. 16	Family correspondence	1896 July–1896 October
b. 4, f. 17	Family correspondence	1897 October– 1897 December
b. 4, f. 18	Family correspondence	1898
b. 4, f. 19	Photocopied family correspondence	n.d.
b. 5, f. 1	Family correspondence	1929–1947
b. 5, f. 2	Family correspondence Containing letters between Nellie and her daughter Betty.	1929–1936?
b. 5, f. 3	To and from John Luther Dickson	1937–1944



**Series IV: Biographical documentation, 1882–2011**

Collected materials		
b. 5, f. 4	From Nellie's childhood	1882–1892
b. 5, f. 5	From Nellie's high school graduation	1891
b. 5, f. 6	Funeral, wedding, and graduation invitations	1894–1896
b. 5, f. 7	John Luther Dickson and Nellie May Clingman wedding book Including inscriptions on the inner cover of the dates and names of children born to the couple.	1896
b. 5, f. 8	Yale commencement program	1908
b. 5, f. 9	John Luther Dickson political poster	1919
b. 5, f. 10	Regarding divorce proceedings Materials relating to John Luther Dickson's divorce from Selma A. Dickson.	1948
b. 5, f. 11	Materials regarding the death of John Luther Dickson	1952–2010s
b. 5, f. 12	Miscellaneous	1896–1976
	Materials gathered and written by Ronald Dickson Ball Materials gathered and written by John Luther Dickson's grandson.	
b. 5, f. 13	Regarding John Luther Dickson and the Mid-day Service Containing written summaries of John Luther Dickson's life and work.	2010s
b. 5, f. 14	Material gathered on Nellie and Betty	2010s
b. 5, f. 15	Genealogical research	1977–2011?

## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

Christian communities -- United States  
Radio programs  
WGN (Radio station : Chicago, Ill.)

### **Geographic Names**

Chicago (Ill.) -- History  
Chicago (Ill.) -- Intellectual life -- 20th Century

### **Occupations**

Radio broadcasters -- United States

### **Genres / Formats**

Radio scripts

### **Names**

Dickson, John Luther (1873-1952)

### **Acquired From**

Ball, Ronald Dickson