

# Guide to the William Lyon Phelps Papers

MS 578



compiled by Diane E. Kaplan and William E. Brown, Jr.

January 1987

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## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	3
Requesting Instructions .....	3
Administrative Information .....	4
Immediate Source of Acquisition .....	4
Conditions Governing Access .....	4
Conditions Governing Use .....	4
Preferred Citation .....	4
Associated Materials .....	4
Biographical / Historical .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	4
Arrangement .....	5
Collection Contents .....	6
Series I: CORRESPONDENCE, 1888-1944 .....	6
Series II: RESEARCH FILES, 1889-1936 .....	7
Series III: STUDENT NOTEBOOKS, 1878-1904 .....	8
Series IV: PERSONAL FILES, 1883-1943 .....	9
Series V: FAMILY PAPERS, 1826-1930 .....	11
Series VI: OVERSIZE .....	12
Accession 2005-M-042: Additional Material .....	13
Selected Search Terms .....	14

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
Yale University Library  
P.O. Box 208240  
New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 578

**CREATOR:** Phelps, William Lyon, 1865-1943

**TITLE:** William Lyon Phelps papers

**DATES:** 1826-1944

**BULK DATES:** 1887-1943

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 10.5 linear feet

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The papers include correspondence, writings, lecture notes, student notebooks, research notes, memorabilia, and scrapbooks of clippings documenting William Lyon Phelps's career as a professor of English and popularizer of literature. Phelps's lecture notes and annotated volumes on English literature comprise half of the papers. The papers also include a small quantity of family papers relating to Phelps's father and wife.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0578>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0578>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to [http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr\\_copy\\_order.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html). The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

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

Gifts of the estate of William Lyon Phelps, 1943; Thomas S. Brush, 1957. Additional gifts from various donors, 1955-1996. Gift of John J. Burns Library, Boston College, 2004.

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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### Conditions Governing Use

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### Preferred Citation

William Lyon Phelps Papers (MS 578). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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### Associated Materials

Related material: William Lyon Phelps Papers, (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

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## Biographical / Historical

William Lyon Phelps was born in New Haven, Connecticut, on January 2, 1865. He received a B.A. degree from Yale in 1887, an A.M. degree from Harvard in 1891, and a Ph.D. from Yale in 1891. Phelps taught English at Yale from 1892 until 1933 and was a popularizer of literature through his public lectures, radio addresses, and syndicated newspaper columns. He died in New Haven on August 21, 1943.

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## Scope and Contents

The William Lyon Phelps Papers include correspondence, writings, lecture notes, student notebooks, research notes, memorabilia, and scrapbooks of clippings which document Phelps's career as a professor of English at Yale University and his role as a popularizer of literature, public lecturer, and syndicated columnist. Phelps's lecture notes and annotated volumes on English literature comprise half the papers. The papers include only scattered items from Phelps's voluminous correspondence. The larger quantity of correspondence is located in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The papers also contain a small quantity of family papers relating to Phelps's father and wife.

The estate of William Lyon Phelps donated a major portion of the Phelps Papers to the Yale University Library in 1943. Thomas S. Brush donated a significant addition to the papers in memory of Katherine B. Ingersoll in 1957. Additional gifts were received from several individuals between 1955 and 1984.

The papers are arranged in five series: I. Correspondence, 1888-1944. II. Research Files, 1889-1936. III. Student Notebooks, 1878-1904. IV. Personal Files, 1883-1943. V. Family Papers, 1826-1930.

Series I contains the bulk of the correspondence in the papers. Most of the letters are incoming and include family letters, Yale announcements, students' correspondence, queries concerning Phelps's research on Robert Browning, and requests from the public relating to Phelps's syndicated newspaper columns. Some items concern Yale faculty and administration. The series also includes architectural plans by Murphy and Dana for Phelps's study, prescriptions for his eyes, printed copies of Phelps's writings, and a transcript with photographs of James S. Ennis, Jr.'s letters to his father during his military service in World War I.

Series II is the largest in the papers. It includes seven boxes of printed volumes annotated with Phelps's notes on the works of several major English authors. The most complete notes are those on the works of Browning. The NOTES section of the series includes Phelps's lecture notes, either for his course lectures or for his public lecture series, along with occasional items of correspondence, clippings, and printed material. Most lecture notes are on specific American, English, or European novelists, playwrights, and poets, but there are also notes on more general literary subjects. The section also includes notebooks from Phelps's research at the British Museum in 1900.

Series III is composed of volumes of notes taken by Phelps during his graduate course work and research at Yale and Harvard and later studies in Germany. The notebooks record course work with Professors Wheeler, Beers, Ladd, Sumner, and Dexter at Yale, and with Professors Baker, Wendel, Royce, Child, Kittredge, and Briggs at Harvard. In addition the series includes notebooks from the Yale University Bible Club under Dr. Sanders, Phelps's 1887 honors thesis on the "Idealism of George Berkeley," notebooks on mathematics from Phelps's high school studies at Hartford Public High School, and Phelps's lecture notes from his year of teaching at the Westminster School.

Series IV includes Phelps's writings, notes, scrapbooks, student papers, and memorabilia. The articles and speeches include typescripts of Phelps's column on books, "Billy Speaks," while folders 233-246 contain mounted clippings in notebooks of Phelps's syndicated newspaper column from 1933 to 1937. Folder 247 contains a copy of Phelps's address as Hartford High School class orator, while folder 250 includes poems written by Phelps. These writings represent a limited sample of Phelps's work. Folder 231 contains additional lecture notes by Phelps and others, while folder 228 is composed of the tributes to Yale honorary degree recipients which were read by Phelps at commencement. Phelps's notes and other research material on Browning are contained in folders 226-227.

The series also includes several one act plays written by students, exam questions and students' exams, and Phelps's gradebooks. In addition the series contains memorabilia of the Metaphysicals such as invitations and parodies for their feast for the sons of John Donne at which Phelps acted as toastmaster. Folder 251 contains a scrapbook of clippings about Phelps, many of them chronicling his activities during summers spent in Huron City, Michigan.

Series V includes a small quantity of family papers, which relate primarily to Sylvanus Dryden Phelps, father of William Lyon Phelps, and to Phelps's wife, Annabel Phelps. The series contains a brief daily diary of Annabel Phelps for January and February 1899. Sylvanus Dryden Phelps's autobiography of his life from 1817 to 1839 is in folder 269. Portions of this memoir are transcribed in the biographical sketch in folder 268. Poems by Sylvanus Phelps are included in folder 270. Folder 267 contains an 1841 autograph book of Hannah B.C. Phelps, whose relation to William Lyon Phelps, if any, is unclear. The volume was purchased as a gift for Phelps by a Michigan friend.

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## Arrangement

Arranged in five series and one addition: I. Correspondence, 1888-1944. II. Research Files, 1889-1936. III. Student Notebooks, 1878-1904. IV. Personal Files, 1883-1943. V. Family Papers, 1826-1930.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: CORRESPONDENCE, 1888-1944

*0.5 linear feet (1 box)*

This series is arranged in two sections: CHRONOLOGICAL and SELECT.

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#### Chronological

b. 1, f. 1-9	1888-1944, undated See also: <a href="#">box 26, folder 273</a>	1888-1944, undated
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#### Select

b. 1, f. 10	Beers, Clifford	1936
b. 1, f. 11	Ennis, Jack Seffren	1917-1918
b. 1, f. 12	Twain, Mark	1901

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**Series II: RESEARCH FILES, 1889-1936***5 linear feet (14 boxes)*

This series is arranged in two sections: ANNOTATED VOLUMES and NOTES.

Annotated volumes		
Browning		
b. 2, f. 13-15	Vols. 1-6	1894
b. 3, f. 16-18	Vols. 7-12	1894
b. 4, f. 19-21	Vols. 13-18	1894
b. 5, f. 22-24	Chaucer: vols. 1-6	1889
b. 5, f. 25	Milton: vols. 1-2	1890
b. 6, f. 26	Spenser: vol. 1	1893
Tennyson		
b. 6, f. 27-28	Vols. 1-4	1896
b. 7, f. 29-31	Vols. 5-10	1896
b. 8, f. 32	Vols. 11-12	1896
b. 8, f. 32	Notes	[ca. 1894-1936]
American literature		
b. 8, f. 33-44	B - H	
b. 9, f. 45-59	H - W	
	See also: Notes on English literature, <a href="#">box 11, folder 109</a>	
English literature		
b. 10, f. 60-94	A - J	
b. 11, f. 95-115	K - She	
b. 12, f. 116-127	Shi - W	
European literature and miscellanea		
b. 13, f. 128-155	A - M	
b. 14, f. 156-183	Poets: A - Z	
b. 14, f. 184	Pu	
b. 14, f. 185-187	R	
b. 15, f. 188-195	S - T	

**Series III: STUDENT NOTEBOOKS, 1878-1904***1.5 linear feet (4 boxes)*

This series is arranged alphabetically by topic.

b. 16, f. 196	Bible study	1888-1890, undated
b. 16, f. 197	English drama	1890-1891
b. 16, f. 198	English history	1889-1890
b. 16, f. 199-201	English literature	1889-1892
b. 17, f. 202	English literature	1890-1892
b. 17, f. 203-204	Germany	1904
b. 17, f. 205	Honors thesis	1887
b. 17, f. 206-207	Mathematics	1878-1880
b. 18, f. 208-209	Philosophy	1887-1890, undated
b. 18, f. 210-212	Romanticism	1890-1891
b. 19, f. 213-215	U.S. history	1887-1889, undated
b. 19, f. 216a	Miscellanea	undated

**Series IV: PERSONAL FILES, 1883-1943***2.5 linear feet (6 boxes)*

This series is arranged alphabetically by topic or record type.

	Articles and speeches	
b. 20, f. 216b	A - B	1936
b. 20, f. 216c	<i>As I Like It</i> English	
b. 20, f. 217	"Billy Phelps Speaks" English	1941-1943, undated
b. 20a, f. 218	C - F	1917, 1928-1934
b. 20a, f. 219	G - I	1904-1931
b. 20a, f. 220	L - N	1932, undated
b. 20a, f. 221	O - V	1938, undated
b. 20a, f. 222	W - Z	undated
	Awards and citations See: <a href="#">box 21, folder 230</a> See also: <a href="#">box 27</a>	
b. 20a, f. 223-224	Books read	1919-1942
b. 20a, f. 225	Books read and reviewed	1941-1943
b. 21, f. 226-227	Browning	1926, 1930, undated
b. 21, f. 228	Commencement speeches: notes	undated
b. 21, f. 229	Hartford lectures	undated
b. 21, f. 230	Honorary degrees, awards, and citations See also: <a href="#">box 27</a>	1891-1942
b. 21, f. 231	Lectures and syllabi	1902, undated
b. 21, f. 232	Metaphysicals	1900-1924
b. 21, f. 233-234	Newspaper articles	1933-1937
b. 22, f. 235-242	Newspaper articles	1933-1937
b. 23, f. 243-246	Newspaper articles	1933-1937, 1940, 1989
b. 23, f. 247	Notebook: Hartford High School	1883
b. 23, f. 248	Photographs	1891-1937, undated

b. 23, f. 249	Plays	1892-1893, 1934-1935, 1941-1942
b. 23, f. 250	Poetry	1914, 1927
b. 23, f. 251	Scrapbook	1926-1927
b. 23, f. 252	Sloan prize	undated
b. 24, f. 253	Student exams	undated
b. 24, f. 254	Student exams: forms	1893-1917
b. 24, f. 255-256	Student grades	1893-1909
b. 24, f. 257	Student papers	1941
b. 24, f. 258-260	Student plays See also: Sloan prize, <a href="#">box 23, folder 252</a>	1922, undated
b. 25, f. 261	Student plays	1922, 1933, undated
b. 25, f. 262-263	Writings of others	1910-1941, undated
b. 25, f. 264	Yale University: miscellanea	1906, 1908, undated
b. 25, f. 265	Miscellanea	1909-1943, undated

**Series V: FAMILY PAPERS, 1826-1930***0.5 linear feet (1 box)*

This series is arranged alphabetically by the names of family members.

b. 26, f. 266	Phelps, Annabel L.: diary	1899
b. 26, f. 267	Phelps, Hannah B. C.: autograph book	1841
	Phelps, Sylvanus Dryden	
b. 26, f. 268	Biographical sketch	undated
b. 26, f. 269	Memoir	1894
b. 26, f. 270	Poems	1834-1845
b. 26, f. 271	Poems and miscellanea	undated
b. 26, f. 272	Phelps, William Lyon, II	undated
b. 26, f. 273	Miscellanea	1826, 1930

**Series VI: OVERSIZE**

b. 27

Honorary degrees, awards, and citations

1883-1942

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## Accession 2005-M-042: Additional Material

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b. 1, f. 1	Letter to Albert S. Cook re: poetry	1918 October 21
b. 1, f. 2	Letter to "Walter"	1921 November 8

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## **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**

American literature  
Educators  
English literature -- History and criticism  
Literature -- History and criticism

### **Occupations**

Authors  
Critics

### **Names**

Browning, Robert, 1812-1889  
Phelps, William Lyon, 1865-1943

### **Corporate Bodies**

Yale University. Department of English  
Yale University -- Faculty  
Yale University -- Students