

CRANBROOK

ARCHIVES

William Oliver Stevens, 1878-1955

Papers, 1927-1935
2.5 linear ft.

Acquisition Number: 1995-90

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History

William O. Stevens (1878-1955) was the fifth generation of his family to choose teaching as a career. His maternal grandfather, Francis Mason, was a well-known missionary of the time, who conducted a training school for native preachers and teachers and translated the Bible into the two Burmese dialects. Although he spent his early boyhood in Burma, Dr. Stevens came to the United States for his preparatory schooling in public and private institutions in Maine and Massachusetts. He graduated with a B.A. in English Literature from Colby College, Maine, in 1899. He was captain of the tennis and track teams.

He was married to Claudia Wilson Miles in 1901. They had two sons: Mason (Cranbrook '33, d. 1942 near Pearl Harbor, Oahu, HI), and Hugo Osterhaus Stevens (graduate of Pratt Institute and a well-known portrait painter who resided in Richmond, VA). In 1903 he received a Ph. D. in English Literature from Yale University (New Haven, CT). Prior to his doctoral work, he had been employed as an English instructor at Colby College. After receiving his doctorate he taught at the U.S. Naval Academy for 21 years, attaining the position of Senior Professor and Executive of the English Department.

In 1924, he left the Academy to become headmaster of the upper division at Roger Ascham Country Day School, White Plains, NY. In 1926 he accepted the position as the first headmaster of Cranbrook School (Bloomfield Hills, MI), which he assumed in late February, 1927.

He believed in the progressive philosophies of education. He believed that character building and self-discipline were as important as a sound academic background to the development of able and honorable young men. He did not believe in rigid, unmodifiable educational planning and was open to many ideas that would improve academic performance. He retired as headmaster in May, 1935, because of ill health. Following a period of recuperation he was acting dean, College of Literature, Oglethorpe University (Georgia) for a year. After leaving that position he devoted the rest of his life to writing and illustrating articles and books, primarily on travel and psychic phenomena.

He was the author of more than 30 books, including multi-biographies for young adults--e.g., *Famous Men of Science*, *Famous Women of America*, and *Famous Statesmen of America*--conduct books for young men--e.g., *The Correct Thing*--local histories, e.g., *Old Williamsburg and Her Neighbors*; *Charleston, Historic City of Gardens*; *Annapolis, Anne Arundel's Town*, and others. Early on he produced satiric verse and illustrations, e.g., *An Annapolis Alphabet* (1906), and "The Strike at Santa Claus", *St. Nicholas Magazine* (Dec, 1907). After the death of his younger son, Mason, his writings became increasingly philosophic and somewhat mystical, *The Mystery of Dreams* (1949) and *Psychics and Common Sense* (1953), being typical titles. He was an accomplished

cartoonist and fine artist, most at ease with pen, pencil or watercolor. He died in his sleep at his Manhattan home, 20 W. 9th Street, on 15 January, 1955.

Scope and Content of Collection

These documents consist of office records in the form of correspondence to and carbon-copies and drafts from William O. Stevens, first headmaster of Cranbrook school (1927-1934). Additionally, correspondence to and from Dr. Stevens after his tenure at Cranbrook, but concerning Cranbrook masters, other employees, and alumni is included. Additionally, some black and white photographs are appended to alumni, faculty and student documents.

The bulk of the collection falls into one series, ADMINISTRATIVE (January 1927-May 1935). The primary arrangement of the collection is alphanumeric, with correspondence files interspersed with other types of material. Correspondence is arranged chronologically within the alphanumeric divisions.

A second series, SKETCHES ([n.d.], 1934) contains six (6) pencil drawings removed in 1979 from the papers of Lee A. White, and three (3) oversized sketches donated to the Archives by Edward Lerchen in 1979.

Related Collections

- Roswell G. Curtis, Jr. Papers (1997-03)
- Cranbrook School Records (1979-06)
- Lee A White Papers (1979-02)

Box Number--Description

Box 1

ADMINISTRATIVE

1. Alumni correspondence, 1933-1934
2. Athletics, 1930-1931
3. Attrition, 1934
4. Awards, 1930-1931
5. "B" correspondence, 1930-1934
6. George G. Booth, 1930-1934
- 7-8. Bulletins (announcements, rules, schedules) 1927-1928; 1932; Jan 1933-Aug 1934
9. "C" correspondence, 1927-1934
10. Classification [social privileges], 1930-1935
11. Colleges correspondence, 1931-1934

Box 2

1. College Entrance Examination Board, 1929-1935
2. Consulting Staff of Cranbrook Infirmary, 1932-1934
3. Courses of study (curriculum analyses and guides), n.d.
4. Cranbrook Institutions, 1927-1935
5. Directors - general correspondence, 1930-1934
6. Directors correspondence, "J", 1933-1934
7. Directors correspondence, Robert R. McMath, 1933-1934
8. Directors correspondence, William J. Norton, 1933-1934
9. Directors correspondence, Morris P. Tilley, 1933-1934
10. Directors correspondence, James K. Watkins, 1934
11. Directors correspondence, Lee A White, 1926-May 1927
12. Directors correspondence, Lee A White, Jun-Dec 1927
13. Directors correspondence, Lee A White, 1928-1929
14. Directors correspondence, Lee A White, 1930-1934
15. "D" correspondence, 1933-1934
16. "E" correspondence, 1933-1934
17. Entertainment, 1933-1934
18. Exhibits, 1933
19. Exams [samples and study guides], n.d.
20. Ex-faculty & staff correspondence, "A-F"

Box 3

- 1-7. Ex-faculty & staff correspondence, "H-W"

Box 4

- 1-4. "F-M" correspondence,
5. Monthly grades, 1931-1932
6. Mid-year grades & final grades, 1932-1933

7. Monthly grades, 1933-1934
8. Monthly grades, Oct 1933-Jan 1935

Box 4 (cont.)

ADMINISTRATIVE (cont.)

9. Monthly grades, 1934-1935
10. "O-P" correspondence
11. Permissions re riding in automobiles & smoking, 1933- 1934
12. Promotions, "A-W"

Box 5

1. Publicity tours (completed), 1934-1935
2. Publicity tours (planned), 1935
3. "Q-S" correspondence
4. Reports to/by Headmaster, 1928-1930
5. Schools - correspondence w/ other schools, 1933-1935
6. Stevens Institute of Technology, 1931
7. Student Council, 13 Feb 1933 - 16 Apr 1934
8. "T-Y" correspondence
9. Tennis tournaments, 1932-1934
10. Tuition correspondence, 1933

SKETCHES

11. Two (2) unidentified buildings; "Cockington", "Rear, Mermaid Tavern, Rye", "Wootton Under Edge, Cotswolds", "'3 Gables', Bradford on Avon", [n.d.]

Box 6

1. Three (3) building sketches--one dated 1934, two undated.

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