

ALBANY INSTITUTE
OF HISTORY & ART

A Guide to the
John Mason Clarke Papers
1865-1925

Collection Summary

Collection Title: The John Mason Clarke Papers

Call Number: FV 1027

Creator: John Mason Clarke, Ida May Bell

Inclusive Dates: 1865-1925

Bulk Dates: 1865-1925

Abstract: None

Quantity: 3 boxes, 15 linear inches

Administrative Information

Custodial History: The materials were acquired in 1975 following the death of John Mason Clarke's son Noah. The items come from Noah's nephew, Mr. Onias Humphrey Jr. of Memphis, Tennessee.

Preferred Citation: The John Mason Clarke Papers, 1865-1925, FV 1027, Albany Institute of History and Art Library, New York.

Acquisition Information:

Accession #: unknown

Accession Date: December 1975

Processing Information:

Final Processing and Finding Aid By/Date: Updated November 2003 by Heather Harrington

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access: none

Restrictions on Use: none

Index Term

Persons: Clarke, John Mason; Bell, Ida May; Winne, Willis; Bell, John;

Organizations: New York State Museum; Gottingen University;

Subjects: Civil War; Germany—Education; Geology; Paleontology—Cohoes Mastodon; family history;

Places: Albany New York—museums;

Document Types: diaries; correspondence;

Biography of John Mason Clarke

John Mason Clarke was born in Canadagua, New York, the son of Dr. Noah Clarke, headmaster of the Canadagua Academy and from a family that migrated to Central New York from Peru, in Berkshire County Massachusetts.

He was the Director of the New York State Museum from 1904 until his death in 1925. He was a geologist by trade, having worked for the state at the time of his directorship. During his tenure as director, he broadened the scope of the museum, opening it up to a broader range of sciences. He also began a study of the economic resources of the museum. It was him who helped acquire geologically significant state lands such as pieces of John Boyd Thacher Park, Green Lakes State Park in Syracuse, and the Chittenango Falls Park.

Mr. Clarke was a highly educated man. He attended university in Germany, at Gottingen University. He also attended Amherst College in Massachusetts. He spoke four languages, at least, judging from his correspondence, French, German, Greek and English. He was also president of the Albany Institute of History and Art.

Scope and Contents of the Records

The collection contains letters he wrote to family and friends while a student at Gottingen University in 1883-84, as well as family and personal correspondence from 1908-24. Some of this material is in French and German. The collection also contains professional correspondence, most noticeably about the Cohoes mastodon from 1908-25. There are several diaries in the collection, written partially in Greek. There is also an autobiography that Clarke started. Ida May Bell's correspondence with her future husband, Willis Winne and her uncle John Bell's Civil War letters are included as well. It is unclear what relationship these people had to Mr. Clarke or the New York State Museum.

Organization of the Records

The records are arranged in three boxes, with no series. **Box 1** contains Mr. Clarke's personal correspondence, including his time in Germany, his autobiography, and obituary. **Box 2** contains foreign correspondence, and professional correspondence, as well as clippings and notes relating to the New York State Museum. This box also contains the correspondence of Ida May Bell and her husband and uncle. **Box 3** contains the diaries of Mr. Clarke.

Related Material

New York State Museum: A Short History, a 1964 book published by the State Museum. It details the tenure of Mr. Clarke as director, as well as his scientific background. The call number is: **708.147 NEW NEW 1964**. There are two copies of the book.

Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

Box #	Folder #	Title / Description
1	1	Letters from Gottingen, 1883-1884—originals
1	2	Letters from Gottingen, typed copies, with partial autobiography, also typed
1	3	Notes for an autobiography
1	4	Obituaries
1	5	Tributes to John Mason Clarke
1	6	Correspondence relative to the Clarke papers
2	1	Foreign Correspondence, no date
2	2	Correspondence, 1908
2	3	Correspondence, 1917-1925
2	4	Notes and Clippings on the restoration of the Cohoes Mastodon at the New York State Museum
2	5	Clippings and Correspondence on proposed Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Museum at Albany
2	6	Clippings and notes relative to the Joseph Henry Statue and Henry in Albany; Henry bell.
2	7	Clippings and notes relative to the New York State Museum
2	8	Poems by J.M. Clarke
2	9	Correspondence of Ida May Bell and Willis Winne; also letters of John Bell
2	10	Miscellaneous
2	11	Publications and articles by J.M. Clarke
3	1	Diary, 1887
3	2	Diary, 1915
3	3	Diary, 1915-16
3	4	Diary, 1917
3	5	Diary, 1918
3	6	Diary, 1919
3	7	Diary, 1920
3	8	Diary, 1921
3	9	Miscellaneous notes, no date