

H. Phelps Clawson Papers, circa 1911-1973, undated

Administration Information

Creator

Clawson, Hamilton Phelps, 1892-

Call Number

RBR Mss. C54 1911

Extent

3 manuscript boxes (1.25 linear feet)

Abstract

Photographs, souvenirs, correspondence, diaries, and published writings of H. Phelps Clawson, archaeologist, poet, world traveler, and later Curator of Anthropology at Buffalo Museum of Science and Director of the Shaker Museum in Old Chatham, New York.

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Acquisition

The *H. Phelps Clawson Papers* were donated to the Rare Book Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library by Thomas D. Mahoney on June 24, 1975.

Biographical Note

Hamilton Phelps Clawson was born December 27, 1892. Keen curiosity led him to many careers, including poet, archaeologist, banker, magazine manager, and museum director. Clawson's family was well-known in Buffalo; his father John L. Clawson owned Clawson & Wilson Co., was part-owner of Hens and Kelly department stores, and was a director at Marine Trust and Marine Midland Banks.

H. Phelps was educated at Yale, and worked briefly at the National City Bank of New York. During World War I he enlisted in the U.S. Army, and was eventually promoted to lieutenant. In the early 1920s, Clawson began publishing poems. His first book, *Transmutation and Other Poems*, was published in London in 1923. There he met his first wife, Russian actress Valia Venitsky (the marriage was brief; they divorced in 1927). During this time Clawson began work as an archaeologist for the Harvard University - Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition in Egypt and the Sudan. He was part of the discovery of the tomb of Queen Hetep-heres, mother of Cheops (builder of the Great Pyramid at Giza). Clawson also worked as a manager of the short-lived magazine *Panorama: New York's Illustrated Weekly* (1928-1929). During the 1930s, he

was appointed Curator of Anthropology at the Buffalo Museum of Science, where he instituted “The Corridors of Time,” the first anthropology exhibits at the museum. In 1946, he married second wife, Louise McAllister Young. Settling in Chatham, New York, Clawson would be instrumental in the creation of the Shaker Museum and Library. His directorship at the Museum lasted 11 years.

Throughout his life, Clawson travelled the world. His archaeological pursuits brought him to Cairo, Egypt and Semna, Sudan. In 1911, he took a cruise onboard the luxury liner “Empress of Britain.” Departing from Quebec, the cruise made its way to Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and France. A 300-mile walking trip in the South of France in 1933 and trips to Ireland and Brazil followed. The common thread through all of these journeys was the extensive photographic documentation Clawson created to record his experiences.

H. Phelps Clawson died April 5, 1975 at age 82 in Buffalo, New York.

Scope and Content

The collection is divided in three series: Personal, Photographs, and Professional work. Documentation focuses on Clawson’s travels, work with the Harvard University - Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, and correspondence. Most of the materials are photographs.

Series I contains a modest collection of Clawson’s personal records. Notable items include two brief travel journals: a 1933 walking trip in Provence, France, and a 1941 journal chronicling his trip to Sao Paulo, Caxambu, and Bahia, Brazil. Both diaries have charming pencil or ink sketches of sights Clawson found interesting, from a rural stone bridge to the manner in which the pineapple he was served was cut up. Correspondence with friends abroad is also included in this series.

Series II is comprised of photographs documenting Clawson’s trips to Europe and in the United States, and his work with the Shaker Museum in Old Chatham, New York. All photos are loose with the exception of a bound [and fragile] album of his 1911 trip to Scandinavia, Russia, and Germany on the ship “Empress of Britain.” *Note:* Photos from his work with the Harvard University - Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition are located in Series III, Subseries A.

Series III contains Clawson’s professional work and consists of 3 subseries: Harvard University - Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition; Poetry; and Shakers. Although each subseries is small, there are noteworthy documents. Expedition records include Clawson’s transcription of “The Story of Sinuhe” as published in K.E. Sethe’s *Aegyptische Lesestucke*, consisting of hieroglyphs, phonetics, and English translation. Numerous photographs and a brief list of objects sent from Semna to Harvard Camp at Giza Pyramids, Cairo round out the subseries. An accomplished poet, a selection of his published works is present in proof form [Subseries B]. Lastly, Clawson’s stewardship as director of the Shaker Museum is covered in Subseries C, and includes photographs and Christmas cards from Shaker communities in Hancock, Massachusetts, Canterbury, New Hampshire, and New Lebanon, New York. Correspondence with Shakers covers a 10-year period [1949-1958]; the main correspondent is Eldress Emma B. King.

Arrangement

Series I. Personal, circa 1911-1969, undated

Series II. Photographs, circa 1911-1941

Series III. Professional, circa 1923-1973, undated

Subseries A. Harvard University - Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, circa 1924-1931, undated

Subseries B. Poetry, circa 1923-1934, undated

Subseries C. Shakers, circa 1935-1973, undated

Container List

Series I. Personal, circa 1911-1969, undated

Scope and content: Contains personal correspondence, trip journals, and collected items.

Arrangement: Alphabetical by subject.

- 1.1 Advertisements, undated; cigarette advertising cards [designed by Rene Vincent].
- 1.2 Brazil, 1941; journal of trip to Sao Paulo, Caxambu, and Bahia, Brazil [with ink sketches]; business cards; English-Portuguese vocabulary list.
- 1.3 Correspondence, circa 1933-1969, undated; includes Helen [?], Mrs. Torrey (Bee) Ford, Minette [?], friend from France; French stamps.
- 1.4-1.5 France, circa 1928-1969, undated; includes 1933 journal of Provence walking trip; souvenir postcards; receipts, business cards; identification card.
- 1.6 *Future National Museum of Brasil of Tomorrow*, 1941; inscribed by author Chauncey J. Hamlin to Clawson. [Fragile. Use caution when handling.]
- 1.7 Other personal records, 1911, 1943, 1944, undated; registration cards for 1941 Ford Super Deluxe Coupe 5903085; road route from London to West Drayton, magazine image: "The First Camping Trip" [Clawson in center?].

Series II. Photographs, circa 1911-1941

Scope and content: Documents Clawson's trips to Europe and in the United States. Photos from his work with the Harvard University - Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition are located in Series III, Subseries A. All images are black-and-white; sizes are noted.

Arrangement: Alphabetical by subject.

- 1.8 Brazil, 1941; includes Bahia: market, fisherman, dancer, streetscape; Rio: Vista Chinesa, market, Gloria Church, National Museum, favala; Teresopolis: Dedo de Deus; Minas Gerais: giant termite nest, landscapes; Caxambu: farm. [31 photos: 3 x 4 3/4" to 4 1/2 x 7"]
- 1.9 H. Phelps Clawson, 1973; portrait. [1 photo: 8 x 10"]

- 1.10 Connecticut, 1935-1936; landscapes. [6 photos: 4 1/2 x 7"]
- 3.1 Cruise, 1911; includes images onboard "Empress of Britain", Canada: St. Lawrence River, Quebec, Newfoundland coast; Russia: Moscow, St. Petersburg; Denmark: Copenhagen; Sweden: Stockholm, Gotland; Germany: Hamburg; France: Paris. [Bound photo album] [Fragile. Use caution when handling.]
- 1.11 Florida, 1934, 1936; landscapes. [6 photos: 4 1/2 x 7"]
- 1.12-1.13 France, circa 1928-1938, undated; images of trip to South of France: landscapes, people, animals, architecture. [46 photos: 1 1/2 x 2" to 5 1/2 x 7 1/4"]
- 2.1 Ireland, 1934; includes Muiredach's High Cross, Galway, Kilbrittain. [3 photos: 4 1/2 x 7"]
- 2.2 Italy, circa 1934; includes views of Lake Garda, town. [3 photos: 4 1/2 x 7"]
- 2.3 Shakers, circa 1949-1958, undated; images of Shaker sisters 1958, homes, buildings, barns at Hancock, Massachusetts, Canterbury, New Hampshire, and New Lebanon, New York. [23 photos: 2 x 2 3/4" to 4 x 5 1/2"]
- 2.4 Shakers: negatives, undated; includes barn (Hancock, Massachusetts), North family workshop, home (New Lebanon, New York), unknown barn. [4 negatives: 1.75 x 2.75" to 2.5 x 3.5"]
- 2.5 Other photos, 1938, undated; includes woman in Berlin, landscape, unknown church. [3 photos: 2 x 3"]

Series III. Professional, circa 1923-1973, undated

Scope and content: Covers Clawson's work as an archaeologist, poet, and director of the Shaker Museum and Library.

Subseries A. Harvard University - Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, circa 1924-1931, undated

Scope and content: Archaeology work with the Harvard - Boston Expedition in Cairo, Egypt and Semna, Sudan, consisting mainly of notes, photographs.

Arrangement: Alphabetical by subject/title.

- 2.6 Contents list, circa 1924; list of objects sent from Semna to Harvard Camp at Giza Pyramids, Cairo [listed by object register number].
- 2.7 Ephemera, undated; includes photo postcard of Queen Neret-iti, Egyptian tour guide business card.

- 3.2 Notes, 1928; Clawson's notebook: "Notes on Semna- A.E. Sudan," includes daily entries, poetry written during expedition.
- 3.3 Photo album: "Harvard Camp, Cairo, Egypt," circa 1927; includes pyramids, worksites, Clawson, landscapes, Cairo, Nile.
- 2.8 Photos, circa 1927-1931; includes images taken at Cairo, Semna, Saras, Uronarti, Abu Simbel: Clawson, worksites and artifacts, Pyramid of Cheops and Chephren, workmen, 12th century fort, palace, Nile, landscapes. [49 photos: 2 x 2 3/4 to 5 x 6 1/2"]
- 3.4 "The Story of Sinuhe," circa 1924-1931; Clawson's transcription as published in K.E. Sethe's *Aegyptische Lesestucke* and consisting of hieroglyphs, phonetics, and English translation.

Subseries B. Poetry, circa 1923-1934, undated

Scope and content: Proof copies of Clawson's published writings.

Arrangement: Alphabetical by title.

- 2.9 *Kitten Litter-ature: Inspired by the Mews of Poetry*, undated; staple-bound proof.
- 2.10 *Poems I*, 1934; bound "rough proof" annotated by Clawson.
- 2.11 *Poems II*, undated; staple-bound proof.
- 2.12 *Transmutation and Other Poems*, 1923; cover proofs. [4 copies]
- 2.13 Untitled poem, undated

Subseries C. Shakers, circa 1935-1973, undated

Scope and content: Photos and negatives relating to Shakers are located in Series II.

Arrangement: Alphabetical by subject.

- 2.14 Christmas cards, circa 1953-1973, undated; from Canterbury Shakers, Emma B. King, Sabbathday Lake Shakers, Lillian Phelps.
- 2.15 Clippings, circa 1950-1969; includes "Old Chatham Museum Shows Tools that Made Shakers Famous," "Shaker Sisters from Maine Visit Area," "Shaker Museum's First Festival to Picture Life of Vanishing Sect," "3 Shakers Here to Visit Museum," "Shaker Library Dedicated," "Round Stone Barn Restored at Hancock Shaker Village," and "Spare Elegance: the Shakers' Round Barn."
- 2.16 Correspondence, circa 1949-1958, undated; includes Emma B. King, Jennie M. Wells, Gertrude Soule, Lillian Phelps.

- 2.17 Postcards, undated; includes images of New Lebanon, New York Shaker community; Sister Mildred Barker. [10 postcards]
- 2.18 Publications, 1935, undated; includes *Souvenir Folder of the Shakers, East Canterbury, N.H.*; *The Peg Board* (May, 1935); Levi Shaw envelope.
- 2.19 Shaker Museum, circa 1956-1971, undated; includes brochures; booklet: *The Twenty Major Galleries; A Guide to Shaker Museums and Libraries.*

Search Terms

Authors

600 Clawson, Hamilton Phelps, 1892-

Subject terms

610 Shaker Museum (Old Chatham, N.Y.)

610 Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Expedition

650 Archaeology

650 Shakers

650 Travel

651 Egypt – Description and travel – 1920-1930

651 Europe – Description and travel – 1910-1940

651 Scandinavia – Description and travel – 1900-1920

Genre terms

655 black-and-white photographs

655 correspondence

655 diaries