

NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS PAPERS (1883 - 1964)
ArMs 1985.004

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OCR by Sarah Steele, January 2008

4 Record Cartons at 5.4.E,
and 2 boxes
(One scrapbook, one DB) at 3.5.E
Listed in databases as “to be...” processed?

NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS PAPERS (1883 - 1964)
ArMs1985.004

Linear inches of shelf space occupied: 60
Number of items: Approximately 3,500
Source and date: Elizabeth Hillis Rasmussen, 1984

These papers document the career of Newell Dwight Hillis (1858 -1929), a noted clergyman, lecturer and author of his day. The bulk of the papers reflect Dr. Hillis's activities during his years at Plymouth Church, Brooklyn (1899 -1924).

Processor: Francesca Pitaro
Date Processed: May 8, 1985

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Newell Dwight Hillis was born in Magnolia, Iowa on September 2, 1858. He graduated from Lake Forest (Illinois) College in 1884 and from McCormick Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Chicago in 1887. In April of 1887 he married Annie Louise Patrick and later that year he was ordained by the Presbytery of Peoria. After several pastorates in the midwest, Hillis was called to the Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn in 1899. Plymouth Church was then well known as the Church of Henry Ward Beecher and Lyman Abbot, whom Hillis succeeded.

In 1899, after less than a year at Plymouth Church, Hillis withdrew from the Presbyterian Church after writing a letter to the Chicago Presbytery denouncing certain aspects of the Presbyterian Creed. Later in his life he became a Congregationalist.

While at Plymouth Church Hillis gained in reputation as a preacher, lecturer and author. During his pastorate he published about 1,000 sermons, one each week in the Brooklyn Eagle. Over 20 published volumes by Hillis include collections of his sermons, inspirational works and a novel. In addition, many of Hillis's addresses were published and distributed as pamphlets.

In 1915 the failure of Hillis's business ventures and his near financial ruin led to his public "confession" that he had sought material gain which was unsuitable for a man in his position. His congregation and his colleagues stood by him. Letters of support were numerous and financial assistance was offered by some of his parishoners. Although the publicity which followed the original disclosure was short-lived, Hillis was involved in litigation over this matter for many years with Frank L. Ferguson, former president of the Board of Trustees of Plymouth Church and Hillis's business partner/advisor.

Throughout World War I Hillis continued to speak and write extensively on events of the War. In 1918 he published *German Atrocities*. His dramatic style of presentation and the sensationalism of many of his "disclosures" about German atrocities aroused a good deal of publicity and ensuing public response.

As pastor of Plymouth Church Hillis organized the Henry Ward Beecher Memorial Movement, including the celebration of the Beecher centennial in 1913. He also planned and secured an endowment for the Plymouth Institute, which was well-known for its social service programs.

Among Hillis's activities outside of Plymouth Church were his involvement in plans for the beautification of Brooklyn, his extensive lecture tours, and his articles and publications on spiritual matters and current topics.

Newell Dwight Hillis died on February 5, 1929.

NOTES

1. Additional Biographical information can be found in:

A Church History, The Study of Plymouth's First Hundred Years Under Beecher, Abbott, Hillis, Durkee and Fifield. New York: Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, 1949.

Dictionary of American Biography. New York: Scribner, 1932.

2. Many of Hillis's published works are available in the library of the Long Island Historical Society.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The papers of Newell Dwight Hillis span the years 1883 - 1964. The bulk of the material covers Hillis's life as a clergyman, lecturer and author, particularly during his pastorate at Plymouth Church from 1899 - 1924. The earliest item in the collection is Hillis's 1883 school notebook. Correspondence and papers of his children, Richard Hillis and Marjorie Hillis Roulston, and clippings and ephemera presumably collected by them make up the small part of the collection which post—dates Hillis's death in 1929.

The collection consists of Hillis's correspondence and writings, business and financial records, ephemera, newsclippings, scrapbooks and family papers. The major activities of Hillis's career which are well documented by the collection are his work in creating the Henry Ward Beecher Memorial and Plymouth Institute at Plymouth Church and his involvement in World War I which included two Liberty Loan tours and numerous articles, sermons and lectures on the events of the War and its aftermath.

Materials relating to these Plymouth Church activities roughly span the years 1906 - 1919 and include correspondence with benefactors, architects, the sculptor Gutzon Borglum and members of the Church Board, financial records, newsclippings and ephemera.

Papers relating to Hillis's World War I activities can be found in the Correspondence, the Writings and Sermons and the Scrapbooks. Hillis's consistently strong anti-German stance in his writings and lectures, including disclosures of alleged German atrocities and his attack on the musician Fritz Kreisler in 1917 provide an interesting look at the nature of World War I propaganda. The public response to Hillis as reflected in newsclippings and the letters which he saved are also of interest.

In general, Hillis's sermons, lectures and writings covered many of the major political and social concerns of his times. As such, they provide some insight into American society of the early twentieth century.

The correspondence, which covers the years 1892 - 1928, includes letters related to both Plymouth Church business and Hillis's activities outside the Church. Very little correspondence of a personal nature is included. Among those with whom Hillis had an ongoing correspondence over the years were Wilfred C. and Henry Leland (Detroit automakers), Lyman Abbott, Gen. Horatio C. King, and the heirs of John Arbuckle. Arbuckle's heirs including Christina Arbuckle and Margaret and Martha Janlison endowed the Plymouth Institute and corresponded frequently with Hillis.

The collection also includes several letters from J. H. Kellogg of the Battle Creek Sanitarium and Melvil Dewey, originator of the Dewey Decimal System, both of whom were friends of Hillis. Letters from Thomas Alva Edison, Booker T. Washington and William Jennings Bryan can also be found in the correspondence files. A letter from Upton Sinclair in May, 1915 is one of several letters written to and from Hillis regarding his anti—labor stance in the Colorado Mining Strike of that year.

The scope and content of the Writings and Sermons, Ephemera, Newsclippings, Scrapbooks and Family Papers are included in the attached series descriptions.

PROCESSING NOTES

This collection came to the Society in 1984. Some of the papers had been separated and sorted into "subjects", presumably by Richard D. Hillis, who also attached notes and typescript copies to some of the correspondence. Since no discernible original order existed, the papers were arranged chronologically. Notes and copies typed by Richard Hillis remain attached to the correspondence.

A binder holding the letters to the Hillises was dismantled and interfiled with the correspondence. Three of the five scrapbooks were also disassembled and filed as noted in the series description.

The Society's vertical file on Hillis (material collected over the years whose provenance is unknown), which contained correspondence, clippings, Hillis's writings and ephemera was also interfiled in the collection.

1. CORRESPONDENCE. 1892-1928. 29 inches.

Arranged chronologically.

General correspondence which covers all aspects of Hillis's professional life. The bulk of the letters fall between 1913 and 1918 and relate to Plymouth Church business (especially plans for the Beecher Memorial and ongoing construction of the Plymouth Institute), and Hillis's personal and business affairs, lecture tours and publications. A major portion of the correspondence is from parishoners and other followers of Hillis. These are generally letters of support and thanks, or requests for copies of sermons and publications. Most of these were either unanswered or else copies of the replies were not filed.

Subseries A

Letters re: Frank L. Ferguson. 1915. 1 folder.

Unarranged.

Letters written to General King and others in response to inquiries about Ferguson's character. When these were clearly attached to letters addressed to Hillis they were filed in the general correspondence. Those filed here were scattered and some are fragments rather than complete letters.

Subseries B

Letters of Support. September-December 1915. 7 folders.

Unarranged.

Letters from the congregation, colleagues and friends in response to Hillis's "confession" of his financial difficulties made in Plymouth Church in September 1915. Approximately 20 of the letters were typed by Richard Hillis and these typescripts together with the originals have been placed in folder 1.

NOTE: Letters which were included in the scrapbooks were not removed. Scrapbook II contains correspondence relating to the first Liberty Loan Tour. Scrapbook IV contains correspondence relating to Hillis's anti-German lectures.

2. WRITINGS AND SERMONS. 1891-1925. 10 inches.

Arranged chronologically by year.

Sermons, addresses and articles by Hillis in a variety of formats including newsprint, typescripts and pamphlets. The majority of these are clippings of sermons from the Brooklyn Eagle.

Subseries A

"Dr. Hillis's Reminiscences". 1923. 1 folder.

Typescript autobiography in four parts.

Subseries B

Published Pamphlets and Reprints. 1 folder.

Included here are published versions of Hillis's lectures and sermons. They include German Atrocities and the Better America Lecture Series. Both of these were written by Hillis but could be delivered by others.

NOTE: Scrapbook I contains sermons delivered during the years 1895—1899. Scrapbooks IV and V include additional writings on World War I for the period

September 1917—March 1919.

3. BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL RECORDS. 1898-1928. 1 folder.

Unarranged.

Records including personal business and financial papers, contracts with lecture agencies, and financial records relating to Plymouth Church business and the Henry Ward Beecher Memorial Association. Of special interest are financial records relating to the construction of the Memorial and the Plymouth Institute, and papers relating to the Alberini timber bonds (which were a major element in Hillis's financial difficulties). A budget sheet for the Mayflower Mission Soup Kitchen operated by Plymouth Church in 1914 is also included.

4. EPHEMERA. 5 inches.

Arranged as noted in the container list.

Items include photographs, lecture schedules and promotional brochures for Hillis's speaking engagements and publications. Also included are Plymouth Church bulletins, programs from tributes to Hillis and assorted brochures relating to people and organizations with whom Hillis was involved. Folder 1 contains a biography of Hillis titled "25 Years at Plymouth Church" which appears to have been written by his secretary, Lucie L. Whitlock upon his resignation from the Church.

The letter collection which is filed here contains assorted letters (most are not addressed to Hillis) from Henry Ward Beecher, Booker I. Washington and others. A few have notes by Richard Hillis attached.

5. GENERAL CLIPPINGS. 1898-1961. 5 inches.

Arranged chronologically by year.

Newspaper and magazine clippings relating to Dr. Hillis, Plymouth Church and persons involved with the Church. Topics of special interest include the Henry Ward Beecher Memorial (mainly 1912-1914) and the Brooklyn beautification plans (1911).

Subseries A

Financial Difficulties. 1915. 2 folders.

Clippings relating to Hillis's financial difficulties and public confession.

Subseries B

Obituaries of Hillis. 1929. 1 folder.

6. SCRAPBOOKS. 1895-1918. 15 inches and 2 volumes.

Arranged as listed below.

Of the 5 scrapbooks in the collection, 3 were disassembled and filed in the order in which they appeared in the volumes. Items in Scrapbooks II and IV were given numbers; items in Scrapbook V were in chronological order and were filed that way. Scrapbooks I and III remain intact.

The scrapbook contents are as follows:

Scrapbook I. 1895-1899. 1 volume.

Newsprint texts of sermons. Approximately 86 pages in very poor condition.

Scrapbook II. May-June 1917. 5 inches.

Newsclippings and a few letters documenting Hillis's first Liberty Loan tour. A binder with the itinerary for this tour is also included.

Scrapbook III. September—October 1917. 1 volume.

Newsclippings documenting Hillis's second Liberty Loan tour.

Scrapbook IV. September 1917-March 1918. 5 inches.

Letters and newsclippings mainly relating to Hillis's lectures on German atrocities in World War I. Some of these were delivered as part of the Liberty Loan tour.

Scrapbook V. April 1918 - March 1919. 5 inches.

Writings by Hillis relating to World War I (much of it strongly anti-German propaganda) and its aftermath. Also includes works relating to the Russian Revolution and "Bolshevism". Includes newsprint and typescript copies of articles, proofs, pamphlets and reprints.

7. FAMILY PAPERS. 1901—1964. 5 inches.

Arranged as noted in the container list.

Includes the papers and correspondence of Mrs. Annie Louise Hillis, Richard Hillis, and Marjorie Hillis Roulston. The papers of Marjorie Hillis Roulston include a typescript copy of her biographical essay on her father which was published in A Church History, The Story of Plymouth's First Hundred Years Under Beecher, Abbott, Hillis, Durkee and Fifield.

NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS PAPERS

Container List (note that box numbers are obsolete; collection has been transferred from document boxes to record cartons)

Box 1

Correspondence

- f. 1 June 1892 - March 1900
- f. 2 April October 1900
- f. 3 1901-1910
- f. 4 1911
- f. 5 1912
- f. 6 January — March 1913
- f. 7 April — August 1913
- f. 8 September - December 1913
- f. 9 January - April 1914
- f. 10 May - August 1914
- f. 11 September - December 1914

Box 2

- f. 1 January - March 1915
- f. 2 April - September 11, 1915
- f. 3 September 16 - December 1915
- Subseries A
- f. 4 Letters re: Frank L. Ferguson

Box 3

Subseries B

- f. 1 Letters of Support 1915
- f. 2 Letters of Support
- f. 3 Letters of Support
- f. 4 Letters of Support
- f. 5 Letters of Support
- f. 6 Letters of Support
- f. 7 Letters of Support

Box 4

- f. 1 January - August 1916
- f. 2 September - December 1916
- f. 3 January — June 1917
- f. 4 August - December 1917
- f. 5 January — May 1918
- f. 6 June 1918
- f. 7 July 1918
- f. 8 August - November 1918
- f. 9 December 1918

- f. 10 January — July 1919
- f. 11 August - December 1919
- f. 12 February 1920 - April 1928 and undated

Box 5

Writings and Sermons

- f. 1 1891 - 1904
- f. 2 1905
- f. 3 1906 - Typescript
- f. 4 1906 - Typescript
- f. 5 1906 - Newsprint
- f. 6 1907 — 1908
- f. 7 1909
- f. 8 1910 - 1911
- f. 9 1912

Box 6

- f. 1 1913 - 1916
- f. 2 1917
- f. 3 1918 - 1920
- f. 4 1921 — 1925
- f. 5 Undated and incomplete
- f. 6 Undated and incomplete
 - Subseries A
 - f. 7 “Reminiscences” - 1923
 - Subseries B
- f. 8 Published Pamphlets and Reprints

Box 7

Business and Financial Records

- f. 1 Business and Financial Records, 1898 — 1928

Ephemera

- f. 2 “25 Years at Plymouth Church
- f. 3 Schedules and Promotional Brochures
- f. 4 Photographs
- f. 5 Plymouth Church Bulletins
- f. 6 Henry Ward Beecher Memorial
- f. 7 Miscellaneous Papers, Notes and Pamphlets
- f. 8 Letter Collection

Volumes

1. “Subjects for Dissertations” (NDH Notebook)
 2. Passport 1918
- Assorted Medals

Box 8

General Clippings

- f. 1 1898 - 1908
- f. 2 1911
- f. 3 1912 — 1917
- f. 4 1918 - 1928
- f. 5 1935 - 1961 and undated

Subseries A

- f. 6 Financial Difficulties
- f. 7 Financial Difficulties

Subseries B

- f. 8 Obituaries of Hillis - 1929

Box 9

Scrapbooks

- f. 1 Scrapbook II (1-35)
- f. 2 Scrapbook II (36-60)
- f. 3 Scrapbook II (61—100)
- f. 4 Scrapbook II (101-131)

Volume

“Itinerary & Information for Speaking Tour in re Liberty Loan - 1917”

Box 10

- f. 1 Scrapbook IV (1-25)
- f. 2 Scrapbook IV (26—55)
- f. 3 Scrapbook IV (56-85)
- f. 4 Scrapbook IV (86—115)
- f. 5 Scrapbook IV (116-145)
- f. 6 Scrapbook IV (146—175)
- f. 7 Scrapbook IV (176-205)
- f. 8 Scrapbook IV (206-245)
- f. 9 Scrapbook IV (246-275)
- f. 10 Scrapbook IV (276—300)
- f. 11 Scrapbook IV (301—323)

Box 11

- f. 1 Scrapbook V (April 1918)
- f. 2 Scrapbook V (May 1918)
- f. 3 Scrapbook V (June - July 1918)
- f. 4 Scrapbook V (October 1918)
- f. 5 Scrapbook V (November - December 1918)
- f. 6 Scrapbook V (January 1919)
- f. 7 Scrapbook V (February 1919)
- f. 8 Scrapbook V (March 1919)

Box 12

Family Papers

f. 1 Annie Louise Hillis, Correspondence 1901 — 1929

f. 2 Annie Louise Hillis, Proofs and Publicity

f. 3 Annie Louise Hillis, Reviews of The American Woman and Her Home

f. 4 Richard Dwight Hillis, Correspondence and Papers (1915 - 1964T)

f. 5 Marjorie Hillis Roulston, Correspondence and Papers

VOLUMES—

Scrapbook I

Scrapbook III