

Guide to the Joel Sumner Smith Papers

MS 461



compiled by Staff of Manuscripts and Archives

April 1980

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 461

CREATOR: Smith, Joel Sumner, 1830-

TITLE: Joel Sumner Smith papers

DATES: 1848-1911

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1 linear foot

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Correspondence, bills, invoices, notes, writings, clippings and other papers of Joel Sumner Smith. His correspondence includes accounts of his life as a student at Yale and as a teacher of music in a Young Ladies' Seminary in Racine, Wisconsin. Much of the remaining material concerns purchases made for the Yale University Library (especially Russian works). Also included are letters from others to his son, Frederick Sumner Smith.

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Requesting Instructions

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Sumner Smith, 1964.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Joel Sumner Smith Papers. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

Joel Sumner Smith, son of David Hume and Tirzah (Howe) Smith, was born on September 11, 1830, in Paxton, Worcester County, Mass. Thence the family removed to Easthampton, Mass., where his preparation for college was completed in 1847. Another removal now intervened, to Wisconsin, with the result that Mr. Smith spent the next two years teaching music in a Young Ladies' Seminary in Racine.

After graduation he remained in New Haven, and for more than twenty years devoted himself with success to the thorough study of music and to its teaching as a profession.

While still thus engaged his interest in musical history led him in 1874 to undertake (without compensation) an exhaustive catalogue of the Lowell Mason Library of Church Music, which had just been placed in the Yale Divinity School. This employment led happily to a closer connection with the university, which began in July, 1875, when he was put in charge of the Linonian and Brothers Library. His activity and precision in this partial occupation proved so invaluable that he was soon induced to withdraw entirely from his former profession and give all his time to the Library. His position remained nominally the same until 1894, but after that date he was wholly occupied in the University Library, with the rank of Assistant Librarian, which had virtually been his position for many years before. His duties were mainly those of a cataloguer, which called into play and developed his remarkable exactness and capacity for minute labor and thorough research.

To fit himself more fully for his work he took up at an early date the study of Russian, to which he added subsequently a knowledge of other Slavonic languages. One fruit of these studies was the publication in 1886 (and second edition in 1887) of "Red-nosed Frost," an anonymous version in the original metres of a poem by N. A. Nekrásov a difficult piece of work, admirably executed.

His studies also led him to the task of collecting a library of about six thousand volumes of representative Russian literature, selected with rare judgment; and in 1896 he printed (in Leipzig) a careful catalogue of this collection, to accompany its transfer to the university. By his strict injunction the source of this large gift was kept a secret, as was also his subsequent devotion of a considerable portion of his income to supplying the wants of the musical department of the Library. It can now be said that these benefactions amounted to nearly \$12,000. His best gift, however, which could not be hidden, was his shining example of loyal, ungrudging service and the lavish devotion of all his powers to the duties entrusted to him.

In the summer of 1901 his health began to fail perceptibly, and in the spring of 1902 he was forced to accept the offer of partial relief from daily service; after a few final months of painful retirement he died suddenly at his home in New Haven, on February 13, 1903, in his 73d year.

He was married, on May 28, 1854, in New Haven, to Miss Elizabeth Mary Davis, of this city, who survives him with their only child (Y. C. 1879)

(Taken from *Yale University Obituary Record, 1900-1910*, 232-233.)

Scope and Contents

Correspondence, bills, invoices, notes, writings, clippings and other papers of Joel Sumner Smith. His correspondence includes accounts of his life as a student at Yale and as a teacher of music in a Young Ladies' Seminary in Racine, Wisconsin. Much of the remaining material concerns purchases made for the Yale University Library (especially Russian works). Also included are letters from others to his son, Frederick Sumner Smith.

Collection Contents

Correspondence		
b. 1, f. 1 - 2	Smith, Joel Sumner to members of his family and others	1848-1851
b. 1, f. 3	Various people to Frederick Sumner Smith	1900-1911
Writings		
b. 1, f. 4	Student compositions	1850-1851, undated
b. 1, f. 5	Clippings of book reviews and letters to the editor	1886-1895
b. 1, f. 6 - 7	Miscellaneous	Circa 1881-1902, undated
Library records		
b. 1, f. 8	General correspondence	1884-1901, undated
b. 1, f. 9 - 10	Russian correspondence	Circa 1889-1901
b. 2, f. 11 - 13	Bills	Circa 1889-1902
b. 2, f. 14	[Accession] file English	undated
b. 2, f. 15	Patents for book supports	1898
b. 2, f. 16	Notebook: index to J. D. Dana's <i>Manual of Geology</i> , n.d.	undated

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

Education
Librarians
Libraries
Music
Women -- Education

Geographic Names

Europe
Middle West
Racine (Wis.)
Soviet Union

Names

Smith, David Hume
Smith, Frederick Sumner, 1855-1935
Smith, Joel Sumner, 1830-

Corporate Bodies

Yale College (1718-1887). Class of 1853
Yale University. Library
Yale University -- Officials and employees
Yale University -- Students