

Thomas Frederick Dixon, Jr. Collection: Finding Aid

University Archives; Gardner-Webb University



Descriptive Summary

Repository – University Archives, Gardner-Webb University

Title – Thomas Frederick Dixon, Jr. Collection

Quantity – 1 box; 3 manuscript volumes; personal library & paintings (not included in finding aid inventory)

Language of Materials – English

Abstract – The Thomas Frederick Dixon, Jr. Collection contains documents, manuscripts, biographical works, and other materials pertaining to the life and literary career of Thomas Dixon. Dixon was a well-known novelist, playwright, and Baptist minister from North Carolina whose novel *The Clansman* (1904) was later adapted into the motion picture *The Birth of a Nation*. The collection includes manuscript chapters from the first writing of Dixon's autobiography and a previously unpublished screenplay.

Processing Information

Processed – August 2016

By – Natalie Edwards Bishop

Acquisition Information

The Thomas Frederick Dixon, Jr. Collection was donated to Gardner-Webb College by Madelyn D. Dixon. Lee B. Weathers, former publisher of *The Shelby Star*, facilitated the donation and transfer of the materials from the Dixon family to Gardner-Webb College. Prior to his death, Dixon and his wife communicated to Weathers a request that his personal library and nine original paintings be donated to the college.

Access Restrictions

Unrestricted

Preferred citation for publication

Thomas Frederick Dixon, Jr. Collection; item description, dates. Series, Subseries, Item #, University Archives, Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, NC.

Biography

Thomas Frederick Dixon was born on 11 January, 1864 and raised in Shelby, NC during the Reconstruction period following the American Civil War. His father, Thomas Jeremiah Frederick Dixon, was a local Baptist minister serving 32 churches within the county during his tenure in the ministry. Like his father, Dixon and his older brother Amzi Clarence Dixon would enter Baptist ministry. The Dixon brothers gained significant national and international notoriety within the profession.

Dixon attended Wake Forest College (1879 – 1883) where he was a charter member of the Kappa Alpha Order fraternity. Dixon's post-graduate studies took place at Johns Hopkins University (1883 – 1884), his studies focused on History and Politics. During this time Dixon befriended Woodrow Wilson, the two would remain in contact into Wilson's presidency. In 1884, Dixon returned to North Carolina as an elected member of the General Assembly of North Carolina.

In 1886 Dixon married Harriet Bussey of Montgomery, Alabama; they had three children: Thomas III, Louise, and Gordon. After leaving his law practice, Dixon decided to enter the ministry where he held a variety of Baptist and Christian non-denominational pastorates over the next 13 years. Dixon served churches in Goldsboro, NC (1886), Raleigh, NC (1886), Boston, MA (1888), and New York, NY (1889 – 1899).

By the early 1900's Dixon concentrated his efforts on writing, acting, and film production. Events from his childhood involving his father's ministry, the Ku Klux Klan, and local events, often appeared as central themes in Dixon's novels. In 1902, he published his first novel *The Leopard's Spots*. Two years later, in 1904, he would publish *The Clansman* which would later be adapted as the motion picture *The Birth of a Nation*. Over the course of his literary career, Dixon would publish over 22 novels in addition to numerous plays, sermons, and non-fiction pieces.

In 1939, Dixon married actress Madelyn Donovan who later became executor of the Thomas Dixon estate. In his later years, Dixon retired to Raleigh, NC where he died on 3 April, 1946 at the age of 82. Dixon is buried at Sunset Cemetery in Shelby, NC.

Arrangement & Inventory

The collection is arranged in eight series:

Series 1 – Correspondence

Subseries A – Correspondence, 1945 – 1975

- 1.A.1 – Madelyn D. Dixon, 1945, DEC 14 (handwritten)
- 1.A.2 – Lee B. Weathers, 1945, DEC 19
- 1.A.3 – Lee B. Weathers, 1945, DEC 19
- 1.A.4 – Madelyn D. Dixon, 1945, DEC 23 (handwritten)

- 1.A.5 – Lee B. Weathers, 1954, DEC 2
- 1.A.6 – Kathleen H. Davis, 1954, DEC 20
- 1.A.7 – John F. Blair, 1955, Jan 6
- 1.A.8 – W. Lawson Allen, 1955, JAN 19
- 1.A.9 – Eugene Poston, 1975, SEP 24

Subseries B – Correspondence, 1956 – 2003

- 1.B.1 – Fred L. Israel, 1956, MAR 7
- 1.B.2 – Donald R. Lennon, 1968, APR 9
- 1.B.3 – Glenn V. Sherwood, 1994, APR 29
- 1.B.4 – Valerie M. Parry, 1994, JUN 2
- 1.B.5 – Anthony Slide, 1998, JUN 10
- 1.B.6 – Valerie M. Parry, 1998, JUL 23
- 1.B.7 – Anthony Slide, 2002, OCT 8
- 1.B.8 – Valerie M. Parry, 2003, FEB 23
- 1.B.9 – Anthony Slide, 2003, MAR 20
- 1.B.10 – Valerie M. Parry, 2003, APR 4
- 1.B.11 – Series of email correspondence, Valerie M. Parry and John David Smith, 2003,

NOV 13

Series 2 – Men of Mark in North Carolina application

Thomas Dixon's application to Men of Mark in North Carolina. Application form has been filled out in handwriting by Thomas Dixon, dated 1905. 3 pages.

Series 3 – Manuscripts authored by Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.

Subseries A – *The Story of a Minister's Son: An Autobiography*

- 3.A.1 – Title page, dedication page, table of contents, 2 pages of Chapter 1 – Conceived in Sin
- 3.A.2 – Title page, dedication page, table of contents, 3 pages of Chapter 1 – Conceived in Sin
- 3.A.3 – Table of Contents
- 3.A.4 – Chapter XV – I Get Religion, Chapter XVI – The Night Watch, Chapter XVIII – My First Love
- 3.A.5 – Chapter XXXI – I Stumble into Paradise, Chapter XXXII – I Build a Boat

Subseries B – *The Traitor: A Dramatic Sequel to The Birth of a Nation*

The Traitor: A Dramatic Sequel to The Birth of a Nation is a soft-bound play manuscript Thomas Dixon intended as a sequel to the film *The Birth of a Nation*. The volume is 145 pages long and contains penciled editing marks. Thomas Dixon's New York telephone number is handwritten on the inside cover page.

Subseries C – *The Flaming Sword*

The Flaming Sword manuscripts are bound as two hardback volumes. Each volume contains editing marks and notations.

3.C.1 – *The Flaming Sword*, Volume 2

3.C.2 – *The Flaming Sword*, Volume 3

Series 4 – Biographical Materials

Subseries A – *Thomas Dixon: North Carolina's Most Colorful Character of His Generation* by Lee B. Weathers.

4.A.1 – *Thomas Dixon: North Carolina's Most Colorful Character of His Generation*, 5 copies of the published pamphlet.

4.A.2 – Manuscript, version 1

4.A.3 – Manuscript, version 2

Subseries B – Biographical and Literary Analysis of Thomas Dixon

4.B.1 – *The Greatest Play of the South* by Durant Da Pont

4.B.2 – *Thomas Dixon, Jr* by J. W. Bailey

Series 5 – *The Birth of a Nation – The most stupendous and fascinating motion picture drama created in the United States* by D. W. Griffith (program)

Photo copy of the original souvenir program for *The Birth of a Nation*.

Series 6 – Photographs

Two copies of a Thomas Dixon, Jr. photograph.

Series 7 – News clippings, 1902 – 2000, undated

Series 8 – Inventory of the books in the Thomas Dixon Collection (undated)

Two inventories of the books in the Thomas Dixon Collection.

Scope and Content

The Thomas Frederick Dixon, Jr. Collection includes correspondence, manuscripts, handwritten documents, biographical publications, and news clippings documenting the life and literary career of Thomas Dixon. Parts of the collection, specifically Series 1, focuses on the acquisition of and research inquiries for the collection. This collection was donated to Gardner-Webb University in 1948 by Madelyn D. Dixon, Thomas Dixon's widow. Local publisher Lee B. Weathers, who had been working on a biography of Dixon at the time of his death, facilitated the donation and transfer of materials between Mrs. Dixon and Gardner-Webb. The archivist arranged

unbound materials in folders with folder title headings (reflected in the Arrangement and Inventory above). The file arrangement was created by the archivist.

Series 1. Correspondence. Includes handwritten, typed, and email correspondence arranged into two subseries. **Subseries A** contains correspondence pertaining to the acquisition of the collection. Of note, are two handwritten letters written by Madelyn D. Dixon. Lee B. Weather's letter dated 19 December, 1945 is addressed to Governor O. Max Gardner, a close personal friend of Weathers and former trustee of Gardner-Webb University. **Subseries B** contains correspondence pertaining to research inquiries for the collection. Letters by Anthony Slide address the acquisition of other Thomas Dixon materials from Madelyn D. Dixon by Raymond Rohauer, former film curator of the Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art.

Series 2. Men of Mark in North Carolina application. Includes Thomas Dixon's 1905 handwritten application to Men of Mark in North Carolina. The application includes basic biographical information as well as Dixon's thoughts regarding various influences at key points in his life. The application is 3 pages long, the handwriting is difficult to read in certain sections.

Series 3. Manuscripts authored by Thomas Dixon. **Subseries A** contains a partial manuscript of Dixon's autobiography, *The Story of a Minister's Son*. The manuscript notes that this is a "First Writing – to be revised and corrected." Chapters included in the manuscript are Chapter 1 – Conceived in Sin, Chapter 15 – I Get Religion, Chapter 16 – The Night Watch, Chapter 18 – My First Love, Chapter 31 – I Stumble Into Paradise, and Chapter XXXII – I Build a Boat. Some chapters are partial while others are completed with editing notations. A version of the manuscript was later published after Dixon's death as *Southern Horizons*. There are differences in chapter sequencing and written content between the first writing and *Southern Horizons*. **Subseries B** contains the soft-bound play manuscript of *The Traitor: A Dramatic Sequel to The Birth of a Nation*. The volume is a 145 page, unpublished manuscript with penciled editing marks. Thomas Dixon's New York telephone number is handwritten on the inside cover page. **Subseries C** contains a typed, partial draft of Dixon's novel *The Flaming Sword* (Volume 2 and 3). The hard-bound volumes contain penciled editing marks and notations.

Series 4. Biographical Materials. Includes several published biographies of Thomas Dixon. **Subseries A.** contains Lee B. Weathers' biography of Dixon titled *Thomas Dixon: North Carolina's Most Colorful Character of His Generation*. Weather's biography of Dixon is a 15 page pamphlet detailing Dixon's life and literary career and is largely based on a series of interviews Weathers conducted with Thomas and Madelyn Dixon. The subseries also includes two typed manuscript versions of Weather's text, one of which was written just prior to Dixon's death in 1945. Both manuscripts contain handwritten editing notations. **Subseries B.** contains two biographical and literary analyses of Dixon. Both documents are photo copies of original texts, it is unknown who and when they

were added to the collection. *The Greatest Play of the South*, by Durant Da Pont, was published in the *Tennessee Studies in Literature* in 1957. *Thomas Dixon, Jr.*, by J. W. Bailey, was published in the *Library of Southern Literature* in 1907.

Series 5. Souvenir program for *The Birth of a nation – The most stupendous and fascinating motion picture drama created in the United States by D. W. Griffith*. This series includes a photo copy of the 1915 original 12 page program accompanying the motion picture *The Birth of a Nation*. The program includes a tribute to “*The Birth of a Nation*” by Rupert Hughes, an address by Thomas Dixon, synopsis of the story, and facts about the film.

Series 6. Photographs. Includes two photo copies of a photograph of Thomas Dixon. This photograph was used as the front cover of Lee B. Weathers’ biographical pamphlet of Dixon.

Series 7. News Clippings. Includes clippings pertaining to Thomas Dixon and his family from 1902 through 2000 and several undated clippings. Clippings include book reviews of Dixon’s works, obituaries, biographical pieces, and information about the Thomas Dixon Collection at Gardner-Webb University. Original news clippings have been digitized and copied onto archival paper. Four news clippings were originally copied onto mimeograph paper which has significantly deteriorated over time; these clippings have been acquired and recopied from microfilmed originals.

Series 8. Inventory of the book collection. Includes two separate inventories that have been conducted of Thomas Dixon’s personal library which was gifted to Gardner-Webb University. While news clippings suggest that the total donation was roughly 1,400 volumes, neither book inventory contains that many titles. Both inventories are undated, the earliest one notes that the Dixon collection was not cataloged and added to the Gardner-Webb Library’s online catalog during the 1997 catalog migration. The University Archives currently maintains a shelf list card catalog of the collection.

Additional Authors, Titles, & Subject Headings

The following entries represent persons, titles, and subjects documented in this collection.

Authors

Allen, W. Lawson

Bailey, Josiah William, (1873 – 1946)

Blair, John F.

Davis, Kathleen H.

Da Pont, Durant

Dixon, Thomas, (1864 – 1946)

Dixon, Madelyn Donovan (1894 – 1975)

Griffith, David Wark, (1875 – 1948)

Israel, Fred L.

Lennon, Donald R.

Parry, Valerie M.

Poston, Eugene

Slide, Anthony

Smith, John David, (1949-)

Weathers, Lee Beam, (1886 – 1958)

Titles

The Birth of a Nation – The most stupendous and fascinating motion picture drama created in the United States (souvenir program)

The Flaming Sword

The Story of a Minister's Son

The Traitor

Thomas Dixon: North Carolina's Most Colorful Character of his Generation

Subjects

American literature – Southern States

Baptists – Clergy – North Carolina – Biography

Dixon, Thomas, 1864 – 1946

Dramatists, American

Lawyers – North Carolina – Biography

Novelists, American

Racism in Motion Pictures

Racism in Literature

Shelby (N.C)