

# **Denison House Records 1890-1984**

*Guide to the Scholarly Resources Microfilm Edition*

From the holdings of the Schlesinger Library,  
Radcliffe College

**Primary Source Media**



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## Introduction

Denison House, the third college settlement in the United States, was founded in 1892 by a small group of college-educated women who were "distressed" and "made restless" by "a sense of privileges unshared," and who looked forward to a time when there should be no barriers between workers of any kind and the so-called leisure class. Their ideal was not philanthropy but democracy, which they defined as "a free flowing life between group and group."

Residents and members of the Executive Committee, Emily Greene Balch (a Wellesley College professor who later won the Nobel Peace Prize), Helen Cheever, and Vida Scudder, and other residents and day workers of Denison House in 1892 and 1893 kept a communal diary in which they recorded their daily conversations with each other, the parish priest, and with the people they referred to as their neighbors. Throughout the early years a strong connection with Wellesley College continued. In 1893 Helena Dudley became the headworker, and for the next fifteen years a more business-like day book was kept of the expanding activities. The settlement, originally located at 93 Tyler Street in the Old South Cove area of Boston, grew rapidly and four neighboring buildings were purchased.

Under the leadership (1893-1912) of Helena Dudley, and of subsequent headworkers, Denison House provided the neighborhood with various activities and facilities: sports for girls and boys; numerous clubs; classes in basketweaving, English literature, home nursing, dancing, Dante, and Shakespeare; and a library, a gymnasium, and a clinic. In addition, during periods of strife and emergency, Denison House joined with other settlements in providing relief programs, such as a milk station and coal distribution.

Located in a neighborhood of many nationalities, principally Italians, Syrians, and Greeks, the settlement worked closely with its immigrant neighbors. Most notable was the Circolo Italo-Americano, which, under the direction of Vida Scudder, held a festival each May and an exhibition of Italian arts and crafts each December. During the summer there were day excursions, a vacation school, and Camp Denison. Members of the Social Science Club, 1893-1900, discussed socialism and the history and ethics of trade unions. The Federal Labor Union, Local 5915, held monthly meetings at the settlement.

For nearly two years, starting in October 1926, Amelia Earhart was a social worker and resident at Denison House. She worked with children and adults as a teacher and home visitor, and devoted her weekends to flying, once dropping leaflets over Boston to advertise a Denison House benefit.

In 1941, as a result of neighborhood studies by Denison House and the Boston Council of Social Agencies, the decision was made to move Denison House to the Dorchester-Roxbury area. The move took place in 1942. For six years the office and the various programs were not centralized under one roof but made use of several local buildings. In 1949 Denison House moved into permanent quarters in the renovated Howard Avenue School. In 1965 Denison House and three other settlements merged to form Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Houses. Each house retained its own director and program staff, with FDNH responsible for program coordination, fund raising, and fiscal management. In 1975, after a fire destroyed the Howard Avenue building, Denison House moved to Codman Square, Uphams Corner, where it still operates today as part of Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Houses.

## Scope and Content

The Denison House records are divided into three series:

- I. History
- II. Administration
- III. Program

These records document the settlement movement in the United States, the history and philosophy of Denison House, the women who started it, the people who worked there and those who took advantage of its services, its administration, and particularly its many neighborhood and summer programs.

**Series I. History (#1-14)**, consists of the reminiscences of Vida Scudder, a paper on the "purposes" of Denison House, a radio talk (1945) by Edward Hudson (headworker), a 1980 slide show, and seven disassembled scrapbooks, containing mostly clippings.

**Series II. Administration (#15-56)**, includes five sections in the following order: Board of Directors and Executive Committee minutes and reports, annual meeting documents, miscellaneous committee reports, some financial records, and material issued by related social and government agencies. Each section is arranged in chronological order.

**Series III. Program (#57-115)**, documents Denison House activities and services. It consists of reports: by the College Settlement Association, by the headworker, by resident workers, and committee members, re: daily activities, attendance, and facilities; a disassembled Circolo Italo-Americano scrapbook; two disassembled albums, as well as reports, and photographs, about summer programs, other activities, and buildings; six disassembled scrapbooks of

mostly printed material (reports, pamphlets, tickets, office forms, newsletters, clippings, etc.), and some carbon copies of correspondence and reports; and two disassembled photograph albums. Each segment is arranged chronologically.

Documents such as Board of Directors minutes, reports by individuals and committees, meeting notices, etc. were preserved by Denison House both by category and pasted in scrapbooks with other items, more or less chronologically.

## Roll Contents

**Roll  
No.**    **Folder  
No.**

### Series I. HISTORY

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | 1  | "Early Days at Denison House" by<br>Vida Scudder, 1937  |
|   | 2  | "Settlement Purposes," 1940   |
|   | 3  | "Denison House, 1892-1945: A Power-House<br>for American Democracy," a radio talk by<br>Edward W. Hudson (headworker), 1945                                       |
|   | 4  | "An Oral/Pictorial History of Denison House"<br>by Park Dougherty, project director, 1980   |
|   | 6  | 1893-1900, n.d. Photocopies; whereabouts of<br>originals unknown  |
|   | 7  | 1900-31, n.d.; includes photographs and<br>information about Massachusetts Association<br>of Women Workers, photographs of Asian-<br>American girls' sports teams |
|   | 8  | 1927-60 (scattered); includes Amelia Earhart<br>correspondence, clippings, photograph (1935).   |
|   | 9  | 1930-35; some clippings regarding<br>Amelia Earhart   |
| 2 | 10 | 1941-50; includes photograph of Dorchester-<br>Roxbury Neighborhood Committee meeting<br>(1942)   |
|   | 11 | 1950-53   |



Roll No.	Folder No.	
2	12	1952-58
	13	1955-59; includes photograph of First Annual Spring Clean-Up Campaign (1955)
	14	Photographs from #7, 8, 10, 13; filmed with respective folders

**Series II. ADMINISTRATION**  
**Board of Directors, Executive Committee;**  
*see also #57-69, 105*

	15	1892-99
	16	1892-1919: excerpts
	17	1901 - Oct. 1, 1906
	18	Oct. 16, 1906 - Oct. 9, 1911
	19	Nov. 1911 - Mar. 1913
	20	Jan. 1913, 1916-19; includes Articles of Incorporation, 1913
	21	1920; includes index for 1918-20
3	22	1936-37
	23	1938-39
	24	1940-42

<b>Roll No.</b>	<b>Folder No.</b>	
3	25	1943-45
	26	1946
	27	1947
	28	Board mailings, 1944-47, n.d.
	29	1948 Reports
	30	1960
	31	1961
	32	1962
	33	1963
		<b>Annual Meetings</b>
	34	1919, 1944, 1947

#### **Other Committees: Reports, Studies**

35	Special Committee "to study the work of the House"; DH Folk Handicrafts Council Committee on Reorganization, 1919
36- 37	"Study of South Cove Area," two versions, 1941; <i>see also</i> #45
38	Boston and local maps from #37, 1930-31
39	"Denison House in Transition," 1943

Roll No.	Folder No.	
3	40	Neighborhood "Family file" list, 1942

### Financial; *see also* 99-105

- 41 List of treasurers, 1891-1942; annual reports, 1909-18; finance committee minutes, 1947
- 42 Tyler Street property: mortgage (1922-23), sale (1941-42)

### Correspondence

- 43 1891-1912 (scattered); includes Emily G. Balch, extracts from Jane Addams letter, JA pamphlet

### Related Social and Government Agencies

- 43a National Federation of Settlements: quarterly, *Neighborhood*, July 1928. Issue is dedicated to two pioneers, Graham Taylor of Chicago Commons and Amelia Earhart of Denison House, and includes Jane Addams article, an interview with Amelia Earhart, and NFS executive committee minutes.
- 44 Boston Council on Social Agencies; *see also* #2; correspondence, report, proposed standards of membership, 1932-41 (scattered)
- 45 "A Study of Denison House" by BCSA, 1939; *see also* #70

<b>Roll No.</b>	<b>Folder No.</b>	
3	46	Notes for study in #45
	47	DH report to BCSA, 1942
	48	Other Boston settlement organizations, 1934-60 (scattered)
	49	Boston City Planning Board, "The People of Boston" (portions), 1939
	50	Dorchester-Roxbury Neighborhood; meeting agenda, brochure, newsletter, 1942-43
	51	Maps from #50, 1932, n.d.
	52	Photographs from #50
	53	United Community Services, "Settlement Relocation Study," 1961
	54	Proposal to National Institute of Mental Health re: Vocational rehabilitation of discharged mental patients, 1965
	55	Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Houses, Inc.: Newsletters, brochure, pamphlet, 1971-84, (scattered), n.d.
	56	Boston maps, 1935, 1940

10 Denison House Records, 1890-1984

Roll Folder  
No. No.

**Series III. PROGRAM  
Reports  
College Settlement Association**

4 57 1890-1904  
58f "1897-1927," incomplete draft  
59 1905-15  
60 1914, 25th anniversary report  
61 1915-28  
62 1928-42

**Headworkers' Reports; *see also* #26, 47, 57-62,  
93-94, 101**

63 1918-20  
64 1934-36  
65 1936-38  
66 1938-39  
67 1939-40  
68 1940-42  
69 1948

<b>Roll No.</b>	<b>Folder No.</b>	
4	70	DH "Dorchester-Roxbury Neighborhood Study," 1943; includes maps
	71	Maps

### **Daily Activity Reports**

72	Dec. 27, 1892 - Mar. 21, 1893
73	Jan. 2-18, 1893
74	Jan. 18 - Feb. 14, 1893

### **Day Books**

75	1893-94
76	1894-97

### **Other**

5	77	"D.H. Diary," 1900-08
	78	Summaries of attendance and activities, 1930-34
	79	Programs and facilities report, 1945

### **Circolo Italo-Americano**

80	1903-06
81	1906-08

Roll No.	Folder No.
5	82 1907
	83 1908
	84 1909; includes club constitution
	85 1910
	86 1911
	87 Design for a cabinet, 1908?; Boston entertainment license, 1909
	88 Re: "Stage Fund of 1910," 1910-28; includes Helen Cheever and other correspondence, PHOTOGRAPHS, tickets

### Camps

89	Correspondence re: Sunnyside Farm, 1909
90	DH Farm guest book, 1919-30
91	Camp Denison: Camp committee report, 1931
92	Blueprint from #91
93	"Development of Georgetown Property," 1935; includes bunkhouse blueprint
94	Headworker reports to camp committee, 1938
95	Girls' camp, 1952-53: Report

**Roll**   **Folder**  
**No.**   **No.**

5      96   Girls' camp: Photographs

97   Miscellaneous camp photographs,  
1927, 1937, n.d.

**United War Fund Campaign List**

98   1943

**Denison House Printed Material**

99   1904-49

100   1929-38

101   Disassembled scrapbooks, 1900-30

102   Photographs from 101

103   1943-48

104   1943-49

105   1949-51; includes Board of Directors'  
minutes, meeting notices

**Photographs: Classes, Plays, Parties, Camp Outings,  
Buildings**

106   1898-1917, n.d.

107   Loose photographs from #106



14 Denison House Records, 1890-1984

Roll No.	Folder No.	
5	108-109	1918-41 (scattered), n.d.
	110	1935-37, 1949, n.d.
6	111	1930s?
	112	1950s-1962
	113	1976-77
	114	Camp Denison, 1977; <i>see also</i> #91-97, 106
	115	Buildings: 25 Howard Avenue, 584 Columbia Road, 1970-79