

Gettysburg College  
Musselman  
**Library**  
*special collections*

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Guide to MS-203:

Louis A. Parsons Papers



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library  
Special Collections and College Archives

Karen Dupell Drickamer

March 2017

## MS-203: Louis A. Parsons Papers

Processed by Karen Dupell Drickamer  
March 2017

### Size

16 of boxes, 5.28 cubic feet

### Location

Special Collections

### Dates

Inclusive: 1895 – 1957

Bulk: 1907 – 1938

### Provenance

Musselman Library received the papers of Louis A. Parsons from David Martin, Sue Boardman, Thomas Notarangelo, (all purchased at the estate auction) and Parsons' grandson, Mark Schonbeck, over a period of four years.

### Biographical Note

Louis A. Parsons (1872 – 1957) was a Professor of Physics and Chair of the Department of Physics at Pennsylvania (now Gettysburg) College from 1907 to 1925.

Parsons was born on April 9, 1872 in Burlington Iowa, to Albion and Mary Hilleary Parsons (1843-1919). He entered Iowa State University in 1891, earning a B.A. in 1895 and an M.A. in 1899. After teaching at Burlington High School, Burlington, Iowa, he entered Johns Hopkins University, earning his Ph.D. in 1902. He continued as an Assistant in Physics at Johns Hopkins for the next year, before teaching at the University of Utah, 1903-1904. From 1904-1907 Parsons served as an Instructor in Physics at the University of California at Berkeley.

Parsons was hired by Pres. Samuel S. Hefelbower in 1907 to create and chair a Department of Physics. It is apparent from his correspondence that although he never intended to remain at Gettysburg College for an extended period of time, he felt another move would be too disruptive for his mother who had been keeping house for him and he passed up several opportunities to move on. His mother died in December 1919. On August 21, 1920, he married Eva Pauline (Polly) Derr (Class of 1910). Their first child, Mary Elisabeth, was born on July 1, 1923 in Gettysburg, and their son, Albion Derr, was born in 1928 in Walla Walla, Washington.

While at Gettysburg College, Parsons worked diligently to build up the new department and sent many physics students to graduate school. He was an active member of both the American Physical Society and the American Electrochemical Society who was often nominated for positions in other colleges. He was an avid photographer and gave lectures on color photography. In 1923, he became a member of the Association of University Professors (AAUP), and joined the local chapter at Gettysburg College when it gained enough members in 1924. The organization was formed nationally in 1915 as a body to enunciate and defend principles and practices of academic freedom and tenure.

Following his dismissal from Gettysburg, (December 10, 1924 to take effect at the end of the spring term) Parsons took a temporary one-year position (1925-26) at Swarthmore College, and by May of 1926 he had secured a permanent position as the head of the Department of Physics at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, where he remained until his mandatory retirement at age 65. The family then moved to Hampstead, Maryland, Mrs. Parsons' family homestead and built a house on the farm.

Parsons' daughter, Mary Elizabeth, attended Gettysburg College with the class of 1944, but left to marry Rudolph G. Schonbeck, also a member of the class of 1944. The Schonbecks lived and worked on the farm in Hampstead. Parsons continued to teach whenever possible and held positions at Blue Ridge College, Dickinson College, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and the University of Maryland at College Park. In 1944, Parsons took a job as a research physicist at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington D.C. His son, Albion, was a student at Johns Hopkins University and graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering in 1951. In September 1945, Parsons collapsed at work at the Naval Research Laboratory. He retired for good due to failing health. Louis A. Parsons died on February 10, 1957.

### Scope and Content Note

As the collection was created from five different accessions and four donors, over a period of four years and each accession was totally random and jumbled, the processor chose chronological order except when a complete subject file was identified. Parsons made carbon copies of most of his correspondence and wrote often to family, friends, and colleagues about both his personal and his professional life. His letters are filled with personal information, descriptions of life at the College and in the Community, as well as his issues with the administration, making it difficult to separate personal and professional correspondence. Anyone researching Parsons' final relationship with the College should read both Series IA and IB from 1922-1926.

### Series Description

This collection is divided into seven series. **Series I:** Correspondence, is further divided into five sub-series: (A) Personal and Professional, 1885-1957; (B) Gettysburg College, 1909-1925; (C) Gettysburg College, Physics Dept., Materials & Equipment, 1909-1925; (D) Whitman College, 1926-1938; and (E) Letters to wife and son. All items are arranged chronologically within their subseries.

**Series I: Subseries A** contains correspondence with family and friends and colleagues, job searches, and correspondence related to his church activities. **Subseries B** consists of Gettysburg College business for the years Parsons taught at Gettysburg College (1907-1925) and describes life in the community as well as the college, the building up of the Physics Department, and trying for a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. 1923-25 includes correspondence with Henry W.A. Hanson, President of Gettysburg College (1923-1952), members of the Board of Trustees, and executive committee members of the AAUP. These

letters center on Parsons' attempts to fight what he saw as the unjust firing of three Department heads at the end of 1922, and then his own dismissal at the end of 1924. **Subseries C** contains correspondence and orders for materials, equipment, and textbooks for the Department. **Subseries D** subject matter is Whitman College Physics Department business. **Subseries E** contains letters to his wife Polly and his son Albion.

**Series II** consists of Subject files, including estate papers, wills, and histories of both the Parsons and Derr families. **Series III** contains writings by Parsons of both an academic and recreational nature. **Series IV** consists of physics manuals, notes, and grades from several schools. **Series V** contains ephemera. **Series VI** consists of photographs taken by Louis A. Parsons of his immediate family and friends. **Series VII** contains news clippings.

## Box List

### Box 1

#### Series 1: Correspondence, Subseries A - Personal and Professional

- 1-1 Finding Aid and Research Materials
- 1-2 1895 – 1899
- 1-3 1900
- 1-4 1901
- 1-5 1902
- 1-6 January – April 1903
- 1-7 May – December 1903
- 1-8 January – March 1904
- 1-9 May – December 1904
- 1-10 1905
- 1-11 1908
- 1-12 January – May 1909
- 1-13 June – December 1909
- 1-14 January – May 1910
- 1-15 June – December 1910

### Box 2

#### Series 1, Subseries A continued

- 2-1 January – May 1911
- 2-2 June – November 1911
- 2-3 January – Mar 1912
- 2-4 April – May 1912
- 2-5 June – July 1912
- 2-6 August – October 1912
- 2-7 November – December 1912
- 2-8 January – March 1913
- 2-9 April – June 1913
- 2-10 July – December 1913

- 2-11 January – May 1914
- 2-12 June – December 1914
- 2-13 January – March 1915
- 2-14 April – June 1915
- 2-15 September – December 1915
- 2-16 January – June 1916

### Box 3

#### Series 1, Subseries A continued

- 3-1 July – December 1916
- 3-2 January – May 1917
- 3-3 June – December 1917
- 3-4 January – April 1918
- 3-5 May – August 1918
- 3-6 September – December 1918
- 3-7 January – June 1919
- 3-8 July – December 1919
- 3-9 January – February 1920
- 3-10 March – May 1920
- 3-11 June – December 1920
- 3-12 January – February 1921
- 3-13 March – June 1921
- 3-14 July – December 1921
- 3-15 January – March 1921
- 3-16 April – July 1922
- 3-17 September – October 1922

### Box 4

#### Series 1, Subseries A continued

- 4-1 November – December 1922
- 4-2 January – March 1923
- 4-3 April – May 1923
- 4-4 June – July 1923
- 4-5 August – September 1923
- 4-6 October – December 1923
- 4-7 January – June 1924
- 4-8 July – September 1924
- 4-9 October – December 1924
- 4-10 January 1925
- 4-11 February – March 1925
- 4-12 April 1925
- 4-13 May 1925

- 4-14 June 2 – 19 1925
- 4-15 June 22 – 30 1925

#### Box 5

##### Series 1, Subseries A continued

- 5-1 July 1925
- 5-2 August – October 1925
- 5-3 November – December 1925
- 5-4 January 1926
- 5-5 February 1926
- 5-6 March 1926
- 5-7 April 1926
- 5-8 May 1926
- 5-9 June 1926
- 5-10 July – December 1926
- 5-11 1927 – 1932
- 5-12 1933
- 5-13 January – April 1934
- 5-14 May – December 1934

#### Box 6

##### Series 1, Subseries A continued

- 6-1 January – July 1935
- 6-2 August – December 1935
- 6-3 1936
- 6-4 February – August 1937
- 6-5 September – December 1937
- 6-6 1938
- 6-7 1940 – 1943
- 6-8 January – May 1944
- 6-9 June – December 1944
- 6-10 January 1945
- 6-11 February 1945
- 6-12 March 1945
- 6-13 April – December 1945
- 6-14 1946
- 6-15 1947 – 1949
- 6-16 1950
- 6-17 1951 – 1957

## Box 7

### Series 1: Correspondence, Subseries B – Gettysburg College

- 7-1 1909-1912
- 7-2 1913
- 7-3 1914
- 7-4 1915
- 7-5 1916

## Box 7, cont.

### Series 1, Subseries B continued

- 7-6 1917
- 7-7 January – May 1918
- 7-8 June – December 1918
- 7-9 1919
- 7-10 1920
- 7-11 1921
- 7-12 January – March 1922
- 7-13 April – June 1922
- 7-14 July – December 1922
- 7-15 January – March 1923

## Box 8

### Series 1, Subseries B continued

- 8-1 May – December 1923
- 8-2 January – February 1924
- 8-3 March – November 1924
- 8-4 December 1924
- 8-5 January 1925
- 8-6 February 1925
- 8-7 March 1925
- 8-8 April 1925
- 8-9 May – June 1925
- 8-10 August – November 1925

## Box 8

### Series 1: Correspondence, Subseries C – Gettysburg College, Materials and Equipment

- 8-11 1909 – 1912
- 8-12 1913
- 8-13 1914

## Box 9

### Series 1, Subseries C continued

- 9-1 1915
- 9-2 1916
- 9-3 1917
- 9-4 1918
- 9-5 1919
- 9-6 1920
- 9-7 1921
- 9-8 January – May 1922
- 9-9 June – July 1922
- 9-10 August – December 1922
- 9-11 January – July 1923
- 9-12 August – December 1923
- 9-13 1924 – 1925

### Series 1: Correspondence, Subseries D – Whitman College

- 9-14 1933
- 9-15 1934
- 9-16 1935
- 9-17 1936
- 9-18 1937
- 9-19 1938

## Box 10

### Series 1: Correspondence, Subseries E - Miscellaneous

- 10-1 Louis A. Parsons to “Polly” Pauline Derr Parsons, 1920 – 1945
- 10-2 Louis and Polly Parsons to their son, Albion Parsons, 1944 – 1954
- 10-3 Lease, Purchase, and Sale of 225 Lincoln Avenue, 1918 – 1936
- 10-4 Letter fragments and undated letters

## Box 10

### Series 2: Subjects

- 10-5 Louis A. Parsons’s death, will, estate, 1957
- 10-6 Hampstead, Maryland, property
- 10-7 Eve Derr Parsons
- 10-8 Mary Hilleary Parsons
- 10-9 Parsons/Hilleary Family History



## Box 11

### Series 2 continued

- 11-1 Derr Family History
- 11-2 Albion Derr Parsons, correspondence, notebook, ephemera
- 11-3 Income Tax, 1947 – 1954

### Series 3: Articles, Papers, and Publications

- 11-4 Parsons, "The Duplication of the Cube and Trisection of an Angle," Feb. 1895. State University of Iowa. TMsS, 16 pp.
- 11-5 Parsons, "Report for Baptist B.Y.U.P.A.," Burlington, Iowa. 2 Aug. 1896. TMsS, 2 pp.
- 11-6 Parsons, "Magnetic Constants," The Transit, Vol. VI, 1898. pp. 17 – 35.
- 11-7 Parsons, "Charles," November 1899. Johns Hopkins University. MS, 30 pp.
- 11-8 Parsons, "Liquefaction of Gases," November 1900. Johns Hopkins University. TMs, 32 pp.
- 11-9 Parsons, "The Spectra of Gases," April 1900. Johns Hopkins University. TMsS, 29 pp.
- 11-10 Parsons, "Biographical Sketches, of Otto Von Guericke, Simon, Stevinus, And William Nicol," January 14, 1901. Johns Hopkins University. TMsS, 17 pp.
- 11-11 Parsons, "History of the Principals of Mechanics," November 1901. Johns Hopkins University. TMs, 45 pp.
- 11-12 Parsons, "Electrical Waves and Oscillation," March 1901. Johns Hopkins University. TMsS, 88 pp.

## Box 12

### Series 3 continued

- 12-1 Parsons, "Biographies: D'Alembert, Poisson, Cauchy," January 1902. Johns Hopkins University. TMs 28 pp.
- 12-2 Parsons, "A Moving Electrically Charged Sphere," March 1902. Johns Hopkins University. TMsS, 40 pp. and incomplete MS draft.
- 12-3 Parsons, "Dissertation: The Spectrum of Hydrogen," 1902. Johns Hopkins University. TMs, 66 pp., and MsS, 18 pp. draft.
- 12-4 Parsons, "Ions and Electrons," April 1903. Paper for America Electro-chemical Society Meeting, New York City, 16 April 1903. TMS, 21 pp.
- 12-5 Parsons, "The Spectrum of Hydrogen," Astrophysical Journal, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, Sept. 1903. pp 112 – 128.
- 12-6 Parsons, "Waves in the Ether," April 1903. Johns Hopkins University. TMsS, 23 pp.
- 12-7 Parsons, "The Energy of Ions," 1904. University of Utah. A paper read at the 5<sup>th</sup> General Meeting of the American Electrochemical Society at Washington, DC, April 8, 1904. Pp. 131-142. Plus Ms 5 pp. draft and 16 page TMs.
- 12-8 Parsons, "Some Wonders of Scientific Discovery (in Physics)," Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 2 January 1919. TMsS, 14 pp.
- 12-9 Parsons, "Our Changing Physics," January 18, 1932. TMs, 15 pp.
- 12-10 Parsons, "The Discovery of Some Wonderful Little Things," n.d. TMs, 4 pp.

- 12-11 Parsons, "The Language of Light," n.d. TMs, 2 pp.
- 12-12 Parsons, "The Ideal Minister," n.d. TMs and Ms, 4 pp.
- 12-13 Parsons, "World's Temperance Sunday," n.d. TMs, 2 pp.
- 12-15 Parsons, "Henry Cavendish," n.d. Ms, 14 pp.
- 12-15 Parsons, "Noah," n.d. Ms, 5 pp.
- 12-16 Parsons, "How a Bird Spent the Morning," n.d. Ms, 3 pp.
- 12-17 Parsons's diary of a trip to Southbern California, via train, ca 1905, including sketches in rear of diary.
- 12-19 Parsons's miscellaneous notes and draft fragments.
- 12-20 "The Life of Joseph," four essays by various children (for Parsons' Sunday School class?) 4 Ms, 34 pp total.

### Box 13

#### Series 4: Physics Notes and Manuals

- 13-1 Physics Notes
- 13-2 Whitman College Manual. Milvay manual for 1<sup>st</sup> year college physics, student and instructor copies. University of California Laboratory manual

### Box 14

#### Series 4 continued

- 14-1 Physics Department Exams, notes, grades, for Gettysburg, Swarthmore, Whitman, and Dickinson Colleges.

#### Series 5: Ephemera

- 14-2 Parsons personal ephemera; graduation programs, etc.
- 14-3 Wedding Invitations
- 14-4 Gettysburg College
- 14-5 Baptist Church
- 14-6 Miscellaneous

### Box 15

#### Series 5 continued

- 15-1 Parson's notes, accounts, addresses, and other ephemera

#### Series 6: Photographs

- 15-2 Photographs of Louis A. Parsons, wife and children
- 15-3 Photographs of unidentified people
- 15-4 Photographs of unidentified places
- 15-5 Film negatives

### Series 7: News clippings

- 16-1 News clippings, often without dates.
- 16-2 American Observer and Weekly News Review 1946/1947
- 16-3 Envelopes

### Removed from collection

Parsons' glass plate negatives from the Boardman accession are in separate housing due to their medium. The glass plate negatives are of College building as well as gardens, family, and people from the community.

### Related Collections

RG-2.0.6: The Papers of the Office of the President of Gettysburg College: William Anthony Granville (1910-1923).

RG-2.0.7: The Papers of the President of Gettysburg College: Henry W.A. Hanson: (1923-1952).

RG-1.0 Board of Trustee Records

### Contact Information

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