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Finding aid for the Emma J. Cole collection Collection 352

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Grand Rapids History Center

111 Library Street NE

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

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URL: <https://www.grpl.org/research/history/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids History Center
Title:	Emma Cole collection
ID:	Collection 352
Date [inclusive]:	circa 1900-1967
Physical Description:	2.8 Linear Feet Four boxes
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	Emma Cole (1845-1912) was a botanist and teacher in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 2007 for her scientific work. This collection primarily reflects the Emma J. Cole Memorial Flower Fund, established by Cole to sponsor special flower services in eight downtown churches. The services were held in June and October between 1912 and 1967 and rotated between the churches. Included are church sermons, programs, administrative documents and a few photographs showing flower displays. The collection also includes Cole's 1901 book, Grand Rapids Flora, a memorial book, a short biography, an estate document and an abstract of title.

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Biographical / Historical

Emma Cole was born in Midland, Ohio in 1845 and, as a child, moved to Kent County, Michigan. She attended Vergennes Township schools and her father, Andrew Cole, owned and farmed property in the township. She later attended school in Lowell and ended up going to high school in Grand Rapids. After high school she cared for her ill mother and got a job teaching at a district school, saving her earnings for college. She attended Cornell University for two years but had to leave early due to her mother's death.

After her mother's death, she returned to Grand Rapids where she taught for twenty-six years at Central High School, retiring in 1907. At first she taught English and history, but, as other students and teachers observed, she was not very good at teaching these subjects, and lessons

were often seen as dull. Once given the opportunity to teach botany, a subject she had loved since childhood, she flourished, sharing her passion for flowers with her students.

During this time, she also developed her botany expertise through extensive traveling and study. She traveled to Europe where she visited famous gardens. She also spent time in Florida, Cuba, Mexico and California, a state in which she traveled extensively and collected many specimens. Locally, she spent six years in the 1890s gathering material for her book on Grand Rapids plants, *Grand Rapids Flora : a catalogue of the flowering plants and ferns, growing without cultivation in the vicinity of Grand Rapids, Michigan*, which was published in 1901. Along with this book, she wrote another scientific publication and lectured at the Kent Scientific Institute, a significant feat for a woman during the early 1900s.

Emma Cole died of typhoid fever in San Antonio, Texas in 1910, believed to be on April 25. Her body was taken back to Michigan, where she was buried at Bailey cemetery in Vergennes Township. As part of her will, she left three funds: a fellowship in botany at University of Michigan which is still used today to fund student summer research projects in botany, a trust fund of \$1500 with the Board of Education of Grand Rapids, with the interest to be used to buy botany equipment for Central High School, and the Emma J. Cole Flower Fund. This flower fund was designated to eight downtown churches, who took turns using the money for a special flower service to be held every June and October. The collection, ranging from 1912 to 1967, includes copies of the sermons from the flower services, along with accompanying church pamphlets when available.

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Scope and Contents

The bulk of this collection is formed from accession 1986.235 and includes the sermons and church pamphlets for a special flower service held every June and October, at the bequest of Emma Cole, by eight downtown churches, who rotated holding the services. The collection of sermons ranges from 1912 to 1967 and includes six black and white photographs of flower displays.

The collection's strength is the amount of material from the eight downtown churches that shows how they used the Emma Cole Memorial Fund. A weakness of the collection is that not much is known about other aspects of Emma Cole's life or work. Apart from Cole's book on Grand Rapids flora, there is nothing in the collection that describes her botany expertise or her travels around the world in search of flowers. There are also no other examples of her scholarly writings. The collection also does not have much biographical information on Emma Cole, though there is one letter of correspondence, a memorial book, and a short biography by the last botany teacher at Central High School. Unfortunately, Cole's correspondence with other botanists and other documents of her research are not known to have survived. The Emma J. Cole Fellowship in Botany at the University of Michigan continues to promote study in the field today.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Grand Rapids History Center

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Various donors, accession numbers 1986.235; C21:A1; C21:A2.2-4; C23.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Collection 275, Box 8.75: Sayings and Sentiments / compiled by the Ladies of All Souls Church. G.R., 1899. Includes Emma Cole, on p. 47.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Botany -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Women botanists -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- Church history
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- records (documents)

- Cole, Emma J. (Emma Jane)

Collection Inventory

Series I. Biographical & Historical Information

Scope and Contents

Biographical information on Emma Cole is limited. This series includes Emma Cole's book, Grand Rapids Flora, a brief biography by a botanist teacher and a memorial book for Central High School teachers.

Title/Description	Instances	
To the memory of the following teachers of the Grand Rapids, Michigan Central High School 1907-1911 : report of papers read in lecture room, Park Congregational Church November 12, 1910, at eight o'clock Mr. D.W. Tower, presiding. (1986.235)	Box 1	Folder 3
Emma J. Cole : founder of a fellowship in botany / Arlene I. Whittemore. March 1941 (1986.235)	Box 1	Folder 4
Grand Rapids Flora : a catalogue of the flowering plants and ferns, growing without cultivation in the vicinity of Grand Rapids, Michigan / by Emma J. Cole. G.R. : A. Van Dort, 1901. (00.[2539].1 and .2)	Box 1	Folder 1

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Series II. Papers

Scope and Contents

This series includes official probate documents establishing the flower fund, along with Michigan Trust Co. correspondence.

Title/Description	Instances	
Abstract of Title. No. 239. E. Cole Est. Ottawa Co. Jan. 21, 1869. (C23.A5.1)	Box 4	Folder OVE
Probate Records. Trust No. 6906. Probate Court of Kent. Emma J. Cole. First Account of the Michigan Trust Co. July 1, 1939. (C21.A2.1)	Box 3	Folder 1

Correspondence

Title/Description	Instances	
Mar. 11, 1900. To Emma Cole, From C.D. Page. (C21:A1.1)	Box 1	Folder 2

Michigan Trust Co. to Peoples Church, September 7, 1939 (C21:A2.2-3)	Box 2	Folder 2
Michigan Trust Co. to All Souls Church, September 6, 1938 (C21:A2.2-3)	Box 2	Folder 2

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Series III. Emma J. Cole Memorial Fund

Scope and Contents

This series is largely a collection of sermons and accompanying church bulletins, which are stored in the front of the folder with the corresponding church service. The contents list the sermons in chronological order according to the church, while the collection physically maintains the original order of the sermons. The folder numbers represent this original order, which was by date only and not by church.

First Church of Christ may have become Central Church of Christ, which later became known as Central Christian Church. The Michigan Trust Company wrote in correspondence to All Souls Church that the Central Church of Christ is referred to in the will as Church of Christ.

Title/Description	Instances	
Preliminary information	Box 1	Folder 5
Cole fund procedures	Box 2	Folder 3
Change in trustee of the fund	Box 1	Folder 44
Photographs of altar displays (1986.235)	Box 1	Folder 46
Emma Cole Memorial Record	Box 5	

General

This embossed, leather binder contained sermons, church bulletins and notes related to the Emma J. Cole Memorial Flower Fund established by Cole to sponsor special flower services in eight downtown churches. Those materials may now be found in individual folders, throughout the collection.

Park Congregational Church

Title/Description	Instances	
June 9, 1912	Box 1	Folder 6
June 25, 1916	Box 1	Folder 13
October 19, 1924	Box 1	Folder 17
October 9, 1932	Box 1	Folder 29
April 26, 1936	Box 1	Folder 36
October 6, 1940	Box 1	Folder 42

August 13, 1944	Box 2	Folder 7
October 12, 1947	Box 2	Folder 13
June 14, 1953	Box 2	Folder 22
June 2, 1957	Box 2	Folder 27
June 3, 1962	Box 2	Folder 31
October 13, 1963	Box 2	Folder 35
June 13, 1965	Box 2	Folder 39
October 2, 1966	Box 2	Folder 41

All Souls' Church

Title/Description	Instances	
June 8, 1913	Box 1	Folder 7
October 18, 1925	Box 1	Folder 19
June 30, 1929	Box 1	Folder 23
October 15, 1933	Box 1	Folder 31

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Title/Description	Instances	
November 2, 1913	Box 1	Folder 8
June 21, 1925	Box 1	Folder 18
October 20, 1929	Box 1	Folder 24
June 18, 1933	Box 1	Folder 30
June 1, 1941	Box 1	Folder 43
October 8, 1944	Box 2	Folder 8
June 13, 1948	Box 2	Folder 14
June 13, 1954	Box 2	Folder 23
June 3, 1962	Box 2	Folder 30
October 6, 1963	Box 2	Folder 34
June 13, 1965	Box 2	Folder 38
June 11, 1967	Box 2	Folder 43

St. Mark's Pro-Cathedral

Title/Description	Instances	
June 27, 1915	Box 1	Folder 9

October 27, 1923	Box 1	Folder 20
October 13, 1935	Box 1	Folder 35
June 4, 1939	Box 1	Folder 39
October 4, 1942	Box 2	Folder 4
June 9, 1946	Box 2	Folder 10
June 12, 1949	Box 2	Folder 16
October 7, 1951	Box 2	Folder 19

First Church of Christ

Title/Description	Instances	
October 29, 1914	Box 1	Folder 10

Central Church of Christ/Central Christian Church

Title/Description	Instances	
June 27, 1926	Box 1	Folder 21
June 29, 1930	Box 1	Folder 25
June 24, 1934	Box 1	Folder 32
October 2, 1938	Box 1	Folder 38
October 12, 1941	Box 1	Folder 43
June 10, 1945	Box 2	Folder 9
October 3, 1948	Box 2	Folder 15
June 12, 1955	Box 2	Folder 24
October 12, 1958	Box 2	Folder 28
October 14, 1962	Box 2	Folder 32
June 14, 1964	Box 2	Folder 37
October 17, 1965	Box 2	Folder 40

Fountain Street Baptist Church

Title/Description	Instances	
June 14, 1914	Box 1	Folder 11
October 24, 1926	Box 3	Folder 2
October 5, 1930	Box 1	Folder 26
September 23, 1934	Box 1	Folder 33
June 12, 1938	Box 1	Folder 37

June 14, 1942	Box 1	Folder 45
Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church		
Title/Description	Instances	
October 10, 1915	Box 1	Folder 12
June 3, 1923	Box 1	Folder 15
June 5, 1927	Box 1	Folder 22
October 25, 1931	Box 1	Folder 27
June 23, 1935	Box 1	Folder 34
October 15, 1939	Box 1	Folder 40
June 13, 1943	Box 2	Folder 5
October 6, 1946	Box 2	Folder 11
October 2, 1949	Box 2	Folder 17
June 8, 1952	Box 2	Folder 20
October 14, 1956	Box 2	Folder 25
June 5, 1960	Box 2	Folder 29
June 9, 1963	Box 2	Folder 33
June 7, 1964	Box 2	Folder 36
June 1966	Box 2	Folder 41
First Methodist Church		
Title/Description	Instances	
October 29, 1916	Box 1	Folder 14
June 8, 1924	Box 1	Folder 16
June 10, 1928	Box 1	Folder 22.5
June 19, 1932	Box 1	Folder 28
June 16, 1940	Box 1	Folder 41
October 24, 1943	Box 2	Folder 6
June 8, 1947	Box 2	Folder 12
June 11, 1950	Box 2	Folder 18
October 26, 1952	Box 2	Folder 21
Church Unknown		
Title/Description	Instances	

October 6, 1957

Box 2

Folder 26

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