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Finding aid for the Ralph W. Demmon art and architecture collection Collection 365

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Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections
Department

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Title:	Ralph W. Demmon art and architecture collection
ID:	Collection 365
Date:	1910-2001
Physical Description:	4.3 Linear Feet Five boxes
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	Ralph W. Demmon (1894-1978) was a Grand Rapids, Michigan designer and architect. Demmon is perhaps best known today as the designer of the war memorial pillars in Veteran's Memorial Park in Grand Rapids. He also did furniture design and had an architectural practice. This collection includes papers, scrapbooks, ephemera, photographs and drawings detailing Demmon's World War I service, his education at the University of Michigan and his architectural career. Also included are an oral history and a scrapbook from his wife, Camelia Alten Demmon and biographical information and ephemera relating to Camelia's family, including limited information on her father, painter Mathias Alten. The collection also contains genealogical data for the Demmon family.

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Biographical / Historical

Ralph W. Demmon (February 17, 1894 - February 25, 1978) was the second son of Elwood F. and Blanche Demmon. Elwood was a member of the Union High School faculty for 33 years, teaching English. Ralph attended Central High School in Grand Rapids and spent two years at the Michigan Agricultural College (later Michigan State University) before enlisting in the Air Corp. He was a member of Photo Section 2, 91st Aero Squadron Division in France, from 1917 to 1919.

Upon his return, Demmon studied Architecture at the University of Michigan, earning a B.S. Degree in 1923 and becoming a certified architect in 1924. During this time, 1922-1924, he also worked in the state architect's office.

His social life, while at the University of Michigan, included activities with Camelia Alten (November 13, 1898 - April 1999), who was attending Michigan State Normal College (later Eastern Michigan

University) at Ypsilanti, Michigan during the same time. Camelia graduated from Central High School in 1917 and Michigan State Normal in 1925. They married July 26, 1924.

Camelia and Ralph had two or three daughters, Gloria Gregory, Dianne, and Betty? (who became Mrs. Gordon B. Boozer). Gloria Gregory's son has been the legal owner of his grandfathers' architectural drawings, which it is now understand will be given to the Public Museum of Grand Rapids.

Camelia Alten was the second daughter of the well known Grand Rapids artist Mathias J. Alten and his wife, Bertha L. Schwind Alten. Her sister, Eleanor (December 1, 1896 - January 1994), married Avery Gilleo, and there is a separate archival collection in the department which documents Avery's correspondence with Eleanor during service in World War I. Viola Alten Gatzweiler was the youngest daughter.

Demmon began his architectural practice in Grand Rapids at the firm of Osgood & Osgood from 1924 to 1927. In 1927 he became self-employed, practicing on his own until his retirement in 1963. Most of his work included homes in the Grand Rapids area, some of which are documented in the Grand Rapids Mirror magazine.

Demmon is also said to have been a jewelry designer, particularly in his later years. He may have learned photography skills from his father, who was self taught.

In retirement, the Demmons lived in Naubinway, Michigan in the Upper Peninsular and in Sarasota, Florida.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

111 Library Street NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503
localhis@grpl.org
URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gloria Gregory (Demmon's daughter), Anita Gilleo. Accession numbers 1995.014, 2002.068, 2008.020, 2009.030, 2009.064.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Memorial Pillars, WWI, Fulton Street Park (Veterans Memorial Park), Grand Rapids - in the Smithsonian Art Inventory. <http://siris-artinventories.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?uri=full=3100001~!298453!0>

Grand Valley State University. Special Collections and University Archives. Mathias Alten Collection. Includes images and documents of Camelia Alten, as well as portraits of both Camelia and Ralph Demmon painted by Alten in 1927.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Architecture -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- World War, 1914-1918 -- Monuments -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- personal papers
- Demmon, Ralph W
- Demmon, Camelia Alten
- Demmon

Collection Inventory

Series I. Biographical

Ralph Waldo Demmon

Title/Description	Instances
Obituary article. "Architect of Pylons in Park". Source?/Date. Photocopy	Box 1

WWI Letters

Title/Description	Instances
"Slash Picture of Crown Prince" Clipping. Source unknown. "Corp. Ralph W. Demmon Tells of Conditions He Found in Preutin". Nov. 24, 1918. Letter to Dad. (E.F. Demmon, 719 Fairview Ave. N.E.) Photocopy	Box 2 Folder 3
Oversized original clipping of above. <u>Immediate Source of Acquisition:</u> Immediate Source of Acquisition 2002.068	Box 2
Honorable Discharge from the United States Army, 1918.	Box 1
Map World War I Campaign, 1918.	Box 1
Application for Survivor Benefits, 1978.	Box 1

University of Michigan.

Title/Description	Instances
University of Michigan. Official Students' Directory, 1919-1920. General Includes Ralph W. Demmon, pg. 177. Also included other Grand Rapids students.	Box 1
Sketch book. [all available pages blank, except the first] General Has "R W D" in black ink top center on front tan buckram cover. Has "Ralph W. Demmon" lettered top center on the first available page.	Box 1

Certificates

Title/Description	Instances
State of Michigan. Board of Registration for Architects Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors. ... Registered Architect, 1940	Box 2
The Imperial Council of the ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine ... in Saladin, Temple of Grand Rapids, Mich. Nov. 8, 1940.	Box 2
United States of American honors the memory of Ralph W. Demmon / Jimmy Carter ... copy	Box 1
Demmon Family genealogy data. <u>Immediate Source of Acquisition:</u>	Box 1

Immediate Source of Acquisition

2002.068

Genealogy of a Demmon and Allied Families / by Elwood Leonard Demmon. Asheville, N.C., 1976. Box 1

Immediate Source of Acquisition:**Immediate Source of Acquisition**

c. 1 1995.010 / c. 2 2002.068?

Camelia Alten Demmon

Title/Description	Instances
Camelia Alten Demmon oral history, ca. 1969. Interviewed by daughter, Gloria Gregory. CD from an audio cassette tape made by Mi-Stories.com. 2008.020. Rights not given to Library; and the several copies of the CD distributed to family or area institutions. CD Needs marked.	Box 1
Sales, 1947-1952, Possibly of Alten work, with reference to checks sent to Ella and Viola / presumed to be Camelia's	Box 1

Mathias Alten

Title/Description	Instances
Mathias Alten, the Man / written by Gloria Alten Gregroy, granddaughter of Artist ; arranged by Henry Matthews, Directory of Collections and Galleries, Grand Valley State University. Presentation to the Grand Rapids Torch Club, Feb. 13, 2001. 2002.068	Box 1

Eleanore Alten Central High School Senior Ephemera

Title/Description	Instances
52nd Annual Graduating Exercises, June 19, 1914 (2)	Box 1
Invitation in original envelop with "Miss Eleanor Alten" card.	Box 1
GR Central High School Point system ... Mostly blank.	Box 1
Party card. Class of 1914, April 25, 1914 (rodent? Damage)	Box 1
"The Piper" play program. Apr. 17, 1914	Box 1
Clipping, June 13, [1914]. "Senior Class Play Proves a Success" Source unknown. Play is "What Would You Do?", with Eleanor Alten as one of the chorus girls.	Box 1
Dance card with gray cover. March 19, 1915. Gilleo listed twice, others just once.	Box 1
Eleanore Alten / Ella Alten. Grand Rapids High School / Central High School Ephemera	Box 1

Receipt, June 8, 1910. Documenting completion of ½ year of study in several courses.	Box 1
Class Certificates (2) June 1913, June 1914	Box 1
Credit Slips for Grand Rapids High School	Box 1
Ella Alten (5) 1910	Box 1
Eleanor Alten (4) 1913	Box 1
Eleanor Alten (6) 1914	Box 1
"I have subscribed to Helios" business cards (2)	Box 1
"The new Central Song" card	Box 1
Rhetoric Blue book / Eleanore Alten, Nov. 24, 1914. Most pages blank.	Box 1

Ella Alten. Miscellaneous

Title/Description	Instances
Program. Afternoon Musicale given by Pupils of Agnus Douglas and Henry C. Post [1910] June 16. Ella Alten listed on the program, piano. <u>Immediate Source of Acquisition:</u> Immediate Source of Acquisition 2009.064	Box 1

Alten Gilleo

Title/Description	Instances
Grand Rapids Central High School Credit Slips (5), 1936.	Box 1

Anita Gilleo

Title/Description	Instances
Anita Gilleo's book in 4-1 grade. "My Progress book in Arithmetic No. 1." Individual Workbook ... / Eleanor M. Johnson. Columbus, Ohio : American Education Press, 1929.	Box 1
The Chart Primer / edited by Samuel McCutchen. (Butler's Series). Philadelphia. : E.H. Butler & Co., 1884.	Box 1

General

Has stamp of school board ownership on front flyleaf. Has notes on front flyleaf for circulation in 1886, including loan to Grandville Ave. School and return, and loan to

Henry St. school and return. Has Viola Alten's name on the title page. Coloring with crayon throughout.

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Series II. Demmon's Architecture

Certificates & Correspondence

Title/Description	Instances	
Certificate. Imperial Council of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Mystic Nobles, 1940-11-08	Box 2	Folder 5
Certificate. State of Michigan Board of Registration for Architects Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors, 1940	Box 2	Folder 5
Letter, June 8, 1925. Exam results granting Demmon the registration.	Box 1	
Program of Examination list. Apr. 1925.	Box 1	

Grand Rapids Mirror articles.

Title/Description	Instances	
Decorators at Home : residence of Claire L. Van Dusen, East Fulton Road. pg. 22-23, v. 7, no. 3, Fall, 1940. See copy below.	Box 2	
A Small House with Big Trees. Home of Mr. And Mrs. Henry Van Steenwyk, 2503 Maplewood Dr., S.E. pg. 24. v. 8, no. 2, Dec. 1941/Jan. 1942 Full issue, but damaged, and relevant pages removed.	Box 2	Folder 2
A Southern Colonial Home : the residence of Mr. And Mrs. Kenneth K. Beukema, 2011 San Lu Rae Drive, S.E. pg. 31-33, what date?	Box 2	

Reference copy materials on Demmon Architecture

Title/Description	Instances	
"Decorators at Home" Grand Rapids Mirror, v. 7 #3, Fall 1940. Featuring the Residence of Claire L. Van Dusen, East Fulton Road.	Box 1	

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Series III. Graphics

Photographs

Albums	
Title/Description	Instances
Gray small album. Unidentified family photos and mostly men at outside activities such as fishing, camping, hunting, etc. Loose image of Avery Gilleo	Box 3
Dark cover with red rot small album. Unidentified mostly farm, some probably college at front, possible Grand River near North Park near the back.	Box 3
Camilla Travel album, 1921	Box 5

Scope and Contents

Most items unidentified, numerous cities, mostly western states. Loose graphic clipping at front with Camelia Alten and Hannah Peterson, skiing on Mt. Ranier, Wash. 7/20/1921 handwritten date. Itinerary for near travel from Grand Rapids & Indiana railway near the back of the album.

Ralph Demmon's WWI photographs album. 91st Aero Squadron Division in France from 1917 to 1919. Photo Section 2.	Box 5
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Scope and Contents

Includes both unidentified candid shots as well as those identified by date and number for Photo Section 2. Only one aerial found near back of the album. Numerous scenes of European cities and towns, landscapes, people, and soldier, some sailors.

World War I images found separately.

Title/Description	Instances
France 1918. Landscapes. (5)	Box 1

Aerial views of large chateaus

Title/Description	Instances
Azay-Le-Rideau (2)	Box 1
Champigny sur Veude (2)	Box 1
Le Lude (4)	Box 1
Rignac (2)	Box 1
Champique (2)	Box 1
Villandry (2)	Box 1
Mixed Chateaus / Cities	Box 1

d'Amboise	Box 1
Blois	Box 1
Chaumont sur Loire	Box 1
Usse	Box 1
Valencay	Box 1
Unidentified chateau sited on a river, with part of the wing of the airplane visible.	Box 1
Unidentified city with shadow of wing in upper right corner.	Box 1

1953 Aerial Survey images (2)

Title/Description	Instances
July 10, 1953. BVZ-3K-55	Box 1
July 21, 1953. BVZ-8K-108	Box 1

Demmon Architecture Images. Demmon Houses

Physical Description: 15 color images

Immediate Source of Acquisition:

Immediate Source of Acquisition

2009.030

Title/Description	Instances
1. Evenson, Fisk Lake, Robinson Road	Box 1
2. Uplands S.E., Cascadia	Box 1
3. Herman House. Darby	Box 1
4. Hardy, Lake Drive.	Box 1
5. Beukemia, Cascadia, Uplands	Box 1
6. Post House, Middleboro Lake off Michigan	Box 1
7. Skiff House	Box 1
8. Woodruff House, Fulton St.	Box 1
9. Fisk Lake, Robinson Road	Box 1
10. Paley, between Fulton and Robinson Rd.	Box 1
11. Applegate, Cascadia	Box 1
12. Penny Brown, Henrietta, near Reeds lake	Box 1
13. Louis Brown, Maryland	Box 1
14. Fulton near Lakeside	Box 1

15. Near Reeds Lake

Box 1

Drawings

Title/Description	Instances	
Pencil and color pending on heavy board. "Book Ends, Decorated. Elevation & Plan.	Box 2	Folder 1
[Unidentified library] Floor plan. Pencil sketch.	Box 2	Folder 4

General

Has notes: "Catalog and librarian's rooms ought to be near hall, and near delivery desk". "Clerk at delivery desk ought to be able to control both reading rooms."

Note: This drawing was found between pages of one of the books from Demmon's professional library. It may be a drawing from his student days, and/or it may be for an actual projects, built or unbuilt, and unidentified.

Architectural Drawings (2 CD's)

Immediate Source of Acquisition:

Immediate Source of Acquisition

2009.030

Title/Description	Instances	
CD#1. Contain Project Folders, 1930s-1940s	Box 1	
CD#2. Contain Project Folders, 1950s-1960s	Box 1	

Drawings.

Title/Description	Instances	
Plan. Book Ends Decorated. Pencil & colored pencil on heavy brown paper.	Box 2	Folder 1

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Series IV. Scrapbooks

Scrapbooks

Title/Description	Instances	
Camelia's Michigan State Normal College, Ypsilanti, Mi. Scrapbook, circa 1923-1924	Box 4	

Scope and Contents

Front cover missing. Gray memory pages at the front coming loose. Includes ephemera, photos, letters, etc. Has several photos of Ralph & Camelia, and perhaps their first child? Includes many images of women, presumed to be fellow students of Camelia. Has image of man holding a toddler, in front of a tree, about 1/3 front the front above a Greenwich Village Party 1922 item. This is believed to be Mathias Alten. Other references to Alten and Mrs. Alten in the scrapbook. Some images presumed to include the three sisters. Some may also be his family. Some photos show discoloration. Some items are absent from their pages.

Ralph Demmon Scrapbook, Univ. of Michigan, circa 1919-1923 Box 4

Scope and Contents

Has ephemera, photos, letters, etc. Camilla Alten clipping, as chorus dancer in "Fads and Fancies", with her picture.

Also includes

- 1 Picture of she with Ralph a couple of pages later, with a photo a Camelia, Eleanor and Avery just across the page.
- 2 Several pictures of houses, unidentified.
- 3 Images of various other decorative works, which may be his, or invitations, which may be his.
- 4 Bird's eye view of Grand Rapids, opposite a red card for University Hospital. Also, images of a house, and of Demmon's parents with Camilla, Eleanor & Avery on the same page. 1922.
- 5 Images of Talisen / FLLW
- 6 Invitations done using blueprint.
- 7 Possibly photos of Paul Cret? war monument?

Scrapbooks. Loose items.

Title/Description	Instances
Demmon WWI Album. Loose at the front.	Box 1
Loose at wooden Greenwich Village Party palette.	Box 1
Photo. Architectural Rendering of a theater and second building / R.W. Demmon, n.d.	Box 1
Letter from Ralph to Camelia, May 8, 1923	Box 1
MSNC Class Day program, June 18, 1924	Box 1
Grade Report on Camelia, addressed to her mother	Box 1
Colorized photo "Ba Niv???"	Box 1

Loose at Florence Weeks wedding invitation page.

Box 1

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Title/Description	Instances
Inventory of Item Separated from this Collection.	Box Unknown

Trade Catalogs

Title/Description	Instances
Kimball & Russell, Wholesale Distributors, window units, stock millwork, building products. Detroit, Mi. 1966	Box 2
Scope and Contents	
Includes trade literature for Anderson Windows, Armstong floors, Marlite, ...	
Exterior Lighting by Sternberg. Catalog no. 5. Chicago, Il. : Sternberg Manufacturing Co.	Box 1
Print list "Catalog no. 6", 1959/1961. (2)	Box 1
Invoice. To Demmon from Sternberg Manufacturing Co. Oct. 21, 1953. Ship to Dr. Daniel DeVries.	Box 1

Metal working trade literature & correspondence.

Title/Description	Instances
Smyser-Royer Company Architectural & Ornamental Metal Work, York, Pa.	Box 1
Cast Iron Verandas and Railings. Catalog E. Has a J.W. Fiske sticker, dated June 1, 1945 attached to the front cover.	Box 1
Letter. Nov. 16, 1943 to Demmon from Treasurer of Smyser-Royer, stating that the foundry discontinued operations june 1942 "for the duration".	Box 1
J.W. Fiske Iron Works	Box 1
Metal Work by Fiske / J.W. Fiske Iron Works, N.Y.	Box 1
Letter. Apr. 19, 1946. To Demmon. On Fiske letterhead.	Box 1
Letter. Dec. 5, 1949. To Demmon on Fiske letterhead. Ralph Watkins, Metalcrafts, Chicago, Il.	Box 1
Letter. June 20, 1946 to Demmon. Watkins letterhead, but for Fiske Iron Works. States to Watkins has recently returned from duty in the U.S. Navy.	Box 1

Letter. Aug. 12, 1956 to Demmon.	Box 1
Old New Orleans Treillage. Chicago : Sternberg Mfg. Co., n.d.	Box 1
House Beautiful Furnishing Annual, 2916. Boston: Atlantic Monthly.	Box Unknown

Scope and Contents

Includes Advertising from numerous Grand Rapids furniture manufacturers.

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