

**The Burke Library Archives (Columbia University Libraries)  
Union Theological Seminary, New York**

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 1

Finding Aid for

**Erwin H. Richards Papers, 1905 – 1907**



Image Courtesy of Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio.

Finding Aid prepared by: Brigette C. Kamsler, December 2011  
With financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

**Summary Information**

**Creator:** Erwin Hart Richards, 1851 - 1928  
**Title:** Erwin H. Richards Papers  
**Inclusive dates:** 1905 – 1907  
**Abstract:** Pioneer Congregational missionary for thirty-three years in South East Africa. Papers consist of correspondence from the period when Richards was treasurer of the Board of Foreign Missions for the Methodist Episcopal Church.  
**Size:** 1 box, 0.50 linear feet  
**Storage:** Onsite storage  
**Repository:** The Burke Library  
Union Theological Seminary  
3041 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
Phone: 212-851-5612  
Fax: 212-851-5613  
Email: [archives@uts.columbia.edu](mailto:archives@uts.columbia.edu)

**Administrative Information**

- Provenance:** Originally part of the independent Missionary Research Library, these records were moved with the MRL to the Brown Memorial Tower of Union Theological Seminary in 1929. In 1976 the records were accessioned to the Burke Library archives with the closure of the MRL.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by phone, fax or email [archives@uts.columbia.edu](mailto:archives@uts.columbia.edu), as far in advance as possible.
- Access Restrictions:** The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, MRL 1: Erwin H. Richards Papers, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library Archives (Columbia University Libraries) at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

**Biography**

Erwin Hart Richards was born to Samuel Newton and Mary (Hart) Richards on May 4, 1851 in Orwell, Ohio. He received his education at Oberlin College with an A. B. in 1877 and an A. M. in 1880. Richards then attended Andover Theological Seminary where he received B. Sacred Theology in 1880. He was awarded an honorary D. Div. in 1897 from the University of New Orleans.

Richards spent most of his life as a missionary in South East Africa, serving for thirty-three years with the Foreign Missionary Board of the Congregational Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church. He worked with the Zulu and Tonga tribes in Natal and Inhambane (now Mozambique). Noteworthy accomplishments include founding the East Central Africa Mission in 1890; reducing the Tonga language to written text in 1883-1884; founding 64 churches and schools across South East Africa; and translating the Bible and hymns into various African dialects.

Richards was married three times – his first wife was Mattie A. Bebout whom he married in 1880. He married his second wife, Carrie A. Duncanson in 1883. He married his third and final wife, Mary Jane McClelland, on October 25, 1903.

Erwin Richards retired in 1908, settling in Oberlin, Ohio in 1911. He died in 1928.

**Sources:**

“Who’s Who in American Methodism,” ed. Carl F. Price. New York: E. B. Treat and Co., 1916.  
Pg.183.

**Collection Scope and Content Note**

The collection contains copies of the correspondence sent by Erwin H. Richards as treasurer of the district of Inhambane serving with the Board of Foreign Missions for the Methodist Episcopal Church based in New York City. Richards also provided an index organized alphabetically at the

beginning of the volume. Topics of discussion include mailing mission papers and publications; acknowledging receipt of letters; and ways to raise money. The correspondence is quite detailed and showed what Richards thoughts were in regards to the people of Africa.

It appears that the letters were written from Africa as one letter addresses a person coming to join Richards in Africa. The correspondence is not entirely written by Erwin Richards – Mary McClelland Richards, Erwin's third wife, is another author.

Pages are very thin and fragile, with some text extremely faded.

### Processing

Book was wrapped in acid-free tissue and tied with acid-free cotton tying tape.

Three diaries written by Richards were noted missing in May 2004. The diaries were from May – Dec 1881; May – Dec 1894; and 1899/1900.

### Further Sources

Oberlin College has a collection of Erwin H. Richards papers which consist of a scrapbook and other Richards family biographical information. The finding aid can be accessed online here: <http://www.oberlin.edu/archive/holdings/finding/RG30/SG271/scope.html>. Oberlin College's Ethnographic Collection is comprised mainly of items collected by Richards; more information can be found here: <http://ocec.oberlin.edu/>.

Pitts Theological Library at Emory University houses the Ira E. Gillett papers in the Archives and Manuscripts Department. Gillett, also a missionary in Africa, wrote biographical sketches on Richards – more information can be found here: <http://www.pitts.emory.edu/Archives/text/mss259.html>.

### Contents list

| Series | Box | Folder | Contents   |
|--------|-----|--------|--|
| 1      | 1   | 1      | <b>[Fragile]</b> Correspondence Book with Index, 1905 – 1907 |