

# **Charles Dawson Papers**

## **392012.CDP.TJSEZ**

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

DuSable Museum of African American History  
03/09/2012  
Chicago, IL

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	DuSable Museum of African American History
<b>Title</b>	Charles Dawson Papers
<b>Date [bulk]</b>	Bulk, 1926-1960
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1912-1980
<b>Extent</b>	4.0 Linear feet
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Charles Clarence Dawson (1889-1981) was a commercial artist best known for his illustrated advertisements of beauty schools and cosmetic products during the 1920s and 1930s. The Charles Dawson papers spans from 1912-1980, and includes original artwork, unpublished writings, personal correspondence with family members, photographs, and documents pertaining to Dawson's time as curator of the Museum of Negro Art and Culture at the George Washington Carver Museum at Tuskegee Institute. The Charles Dawson papers are arranged into five series.</p>

## **Biographical/Historical note**

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Charles Clarence Dawson (1889-1981) was a commercial artist best known for his illustrated advertisements of beauty schools and cosmetic products during the 1920s and 1930s. He was born in Brunswick, Georgia, and attended Tuskegee Institute from 1905 to 1907 before moving to New York to study at the Art Students League of New York, where he was the first African American admitted to the program. In 1912, Dawson attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he was a founding member of the Arts and Letters Society. From 1917-1919, Dawson served in the U.S. Army as a member of the 365th Regiment of the 92nd Infantry Division, or the “Buffalo Soldier Division,” the only segregated infantry to see combat during the war. At Chicago’s Century of Progress Fair in 1933-1934, Dawson was the only African American artist commissioned to create an artistic piece for the Fair. From 1936 to 1941 he served as the Director of Arts and Crafts and Co-Administrator of the City of Chicago Work and Training Program of the National Youth Administration of Illinois. During that time he designed the layout and made historical dioramas for the American Negro Exposition held in the Chicago Coliseum in 1940. In 1944, the dioramas were transferred to the Museum of Negro Art and Culture at the George Washington Carver Museum at Tuskegee Institute where Dawson served as curator from 1944 to 1951.

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## **Scope and Contents note**

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The Charles Dawson papers spans from 1912-1980. The papers are arranged into five series: “Artistic Works,” “Writings,” “Personal Material,” “Photographs,” and “Collection Information.” The collection features original sketches and published versions of Dawson’s art, and his writings about African American art and culture, including an unpublished autobiography. His time as curator of the Museum of Negro Art and Culture at the George Washington Carver Museum is represented through his writings about the museum’s holdings and correspondence. Personal correspondence and photographs are also included in the collection. This collection will be valuable for researchers interested in African American art and artists.

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## **Administrative Information**

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### **Publication Information**

## Controlled Access Headings

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### Personal Name(s)

- Carver, George Washington
- Dawson, Charles, 1889-1981

### Subject(s)

- African American art
- African American artists
- African American soldiers
- New Negro Movement in the visual arts
- Tuskegee Institute
- United States Army, 92nd Infantry

## Series I: Artistic Works,

## Collection Inventory

### Series I: Artistic Works, 1926-1981

#### Scope and Contents note

This series includes Charles Dawson's original commercial art, as well as correspondence regarding his art. It also includes exhibition programs. "Artistic Work" is arranged into four subseries, "Originals," "Published Art," "Correspondence," and "Exhibitions."

### Subseries 1: Originals, circa 1932

#### Scope and Contents note

This subseries includes original sketches and prints of Dawson's art. The partial inventory lists names and dates for some of the correspondence found throughout the papers. The portfolio contains correspondence and biographical information along with the art.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Partial Inventory, undated	1	1
		<b>Box</b>
Portfolio (binder), undated		1
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
ABC's of Great Negroes Pencil Sketches, circa 1932	1	2
Sketches, undated	1	3

**Subseries 2: Published Art,**

Prints, undated	1	4-6
		<b>Box</b>
Oversized prints, undated		6

**Subseries 2: Published Art, 1933-1970****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries includes copies of Dawson's 1933 book, *The ABC's of Great Negroes*, and artwork from newspapers, magazines, and other publications. Folder 12 is oversized and located in box 6.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
ABC's of Great Negroes, 1933	1	7
Newspaper Clippings, undated	1	8-9
Magazines and Other, undated	1	10-11
The Philadelphia Inquirer, 1970 July 19	6	12

**Subseries 3: Correspondence, 1926-1958****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries includes correspondence that relate to Dawson's artwork.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
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**Subseries 4: Exhibitions,**

Contract with Annie Malone, Poro College, 1941	1	13
ABC's of Great Negroes Correspondence, 1932-1945	1	14
Artwork Correspondence, 1926-1958	1	15

**Subseries 4: Exhibitions, 1944-1952, 1981****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries includes pamphlets and programs from exhibitions that featured Dawson's art.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Exhibitions, 1944-1952	1	16
Charles C. Dawson: A Retrospective, The DuSable Museum, 1981	1	17

**Series II: Writings, undated****Scope and Contents note**

This series contains the writings of Charles Dawson. It includes a full manuscript of his unpublished autobiography, a manuscript titled, "Negro Art and Culture," and drafts of unidentified writings.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Manuscript of Negro in Art and Culture, undated	2	18
Manuscript of Autobiography (2 binders), undated	2	18



**Series III: Personal Material,**

Drafts, undated	3	19-23
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**Series III: Personal Material, 1912-1980****Scope and Contents note**

“Personal Material” reflects Dawson’s service in the Military, his time as curator at Tuskegee Institute, and contains correspondence with family and friends along with other personal items. The series is arranged into five subseries, “Tuskegee,” “Military Service,” “Personal Correspondence,” “Clippings,” and “Personal Items.”

**Subseries 1: Tuskegee, 1930-1959 (Bulk, 1941-1951)****Scope and Contents note**

The majority of documents in “Tuskegee” were acquired during Dawson’s time as curator of the Museum of Negro Art and Culture at the George Washington Carver Museum at the Tuskegee Institute. It includes an employment contract, equipment inventories, a copy of his transcript as a student, an annual report of the president, correspondence, and biographical information about George Washington Carver.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
The Tuskegeean, 1930	3	24
Tuskegee, 1941-1951	3	25
Golden Anniversary Certificate of Honor, 1959	3	26

**Subseries 2: Military Service, 1912-1923 (Bulk, 1937-1960)**

**Subseries 3: Personal Correspondence,****Scope and Contents note**

“Military Service” includes correspondence from Dawson’s time in active duty, and correspondence and financial documents related to his acquisition of Veteran benefits.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Infantry Correspondence, 1912-1923	3	27
Military and Finances, 1937-1954	3	28
Military and Finances, 1951-1960	3	29

**Subseries 3: Personal Correspondence, 1915-1980****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries is primarily comprised of letters between Dawson and family members. There is some correspondence between Dawson and organizers of the American Negro Exhibition in 1940. Of note in this subseries is a letter from W.E.B. DuBois, correspondence from the Art Institute of Chicago during Dawson’s time as a student there, and subsequent letters of recommendation from the Institute.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Personal Correspondence, 1915, 1917	3	30
Personal Correspondence, 1920-1927	3	31
Personal Correspondence, 1931, 1940-1943	3	32
Personal Correspondence, 1944-1945	3	33

**Subseries 4: Clippings,**

Personal Correspondence, 1946-1949	3	34
Personal Correspondence, 1950-1959	4	35
Personal Correspondence, 1950-1953	4	36
Personal Correspondence, 1954	4	37
Personal Correspondence, 1956-1967	4	38
Personal Correspondence, 1957-1958	4	39
Personal Correspondence, 1970-1980	4	40
Personal Correspondence, undated	4	41-43

**Subseries 4: Clippings, 1925-1971****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries contains newspaper clippings related to the Civil Rights Movement, African American artists, George Washington Carver, and Dawson's art.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Newspaper Clippings, 1925-1971	4	44-49

**Subseries 5: Personal Items, 1939-1964**

**Series IV: Photographs,****Scope and Contents note**

This subseries contains publications collected by Dawson and handwritten notes. Of note in this subseries are letters from George Washington Carver to Mary Randolph Witmer.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Personal Items, 1939-1964	4	50-53
“Democracy-U.S.A.” WBBM Radio Program Transcript, 1947	4	54
Handwritten notes, undated	4	55
Biographical Info, undated	4	56
Letters from George Washington Carver to Mary Randolph Witmer, 1936	5	57
Eyeglasses, undated	5	58

**Series IV: Photographs, undated****Scope and Contents note**

This series contains identified and unidentified photographs. Identified photographs show Dawson as an art student, with his wife, and as curator of the Museum of Negro Art and Culture at George Washington Carver Museum at Tuskegee. There is a signed photograph of George Washington Carver.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Photographs, undated	5	59-62

**Box**

## Series V: Collection Information,

Photograph in frame, undated

5

**Series V: Collection Information, 1990-2003****Scope and Contents note**

This series is comprised of material pertaining to the Charles Dawson papers at the DuSable Museum of African American History, including a microfilm version of this collection held at the Smithsonian Institute's Archives of American Art. This series also includes Margaret Burroughs' and Eugene Feldman's correspondence with Mary Dawson, Charles' wife, about the acquisition of the collection and exhibits containing Dawson's work.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Art Institute of Chicago Correspondence and CD, 2003	5	63
Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute Correspondence and Microfilm, 1990	5	64
Eugene Feldman Correspondence, undated	5	65
DuSable Museum Correspondence, 1975-1985	6	66
Inventory, 1973-1984	6	67-68