



**Robert Fisher Oxnam Papers, 1941-2001 [Bulk 1941-1974]
Finding Aid**

**Drew University Archives
36 Madison Avenue
Madison, NJ 07940
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<http://www.drew.edu/depts/library/archives.aspx>

Summary Information

Creator

Oxnam, Robert Fisher.

Title and dates

Robert Fisher Oxnam Papers, 1941-2001 [Bulk 1941-1974]

Abstract

Dr. Robert Fisher Oxnam was the eighth president of Drew University from 1962 to 1974. He served as Drew's first and only chancellor following his resignation from the presidency due to a serious illness. This collection includes a journal and scrapbooks compiled while in the U.S. Army and working at Boston University and Syracuse University; correspondence and speeches from Oxnam's time as president of the Pratt Institute and Drew University.

Size

1.7 linear feet (4 boxes)

Location

Drew University Archives
Madison, NJ

Language of materials

English

Biography

Dr. Robert Fisher Oxnam served Drew University from 1961 to 1974 as the first lay person to hold the position of university president in Drew history. A native of Boston, Massachusetts, Oxnam was the son of Garfield Bromley Oxnam and Ruth Fisher Oxnam. Oxnam graduated from De Pauw University (Indiana) in 1937, then earned a master's degree in political science at the University of Southern California. He enlisted in the army and served in Europe as an infantry captain during World War II. He returned to USC to complete a second master's degree in public administration in 1947 and a doctorate in political science a year later.

While at USC, he served as an assistant director of public affairs and then went to Syracuse University (New York) in 1948 to be assistant dean of liberal arts, acting dean of the School of Speech and Dramatic Art, assistant professor of government, and assistant to the chancellor. In 1953, he filled a new post at Boston University as vice president for administration, and in 1958 became president of the Pratt Institute (New York). He was later honored by Syracuse University with a medal "for service to education and society." He also received honorary degrees from the American University (Washington, DC), De Pauw University, West Virginia Wesleyan College, and Norwich University (Vermont).

A son of the late Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, he was a leader in the United Methodist Church, holding memberships on the Executive Committee of the World Methodist Council, the Commission on the Structure of Methodism Overseas, and the Commission on Ecumenical Affairs, and the chairmanship of the Crusade Scholarship Committee. He was active in educational, international, and civic affairs, holding memberships in the American Society of Public Administration, the American Political Science Association, the American Academy of Political Science, the American Association of University Professors, and The Century Association of New York City. He was also president of the College-Federal Agency Council of the New York Region, U.S. Civil Service, and a director of the Greater New York Council for Foreign Service.

Oxnam left his mark during his tenure as Drew president. The enrollment rose from about 950 to 1,844, the number of buildings from 26 to 41, and the library budget from \$100,000 to about \$450,000. The University budget, balanced throughout his term in office, quadrupled from just over \$2 million to about \$8 ½ million. Dr. and Mrs. Oxnam frequently opened their home to student organizations, alumni groups, and visitors to the campus, including Martin Luther King, Madame Indira Ghandi, and Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan.

Under Oxnam's leadership, the College of Liberal Arts introduced a half-dozen off-campus and overseas programs, including semesters in Brussels and with the United Nations in New York. The Theological School developed innovative programs in continuing education, field work, and the professional doctorate, using outstanding clergy from the New York metropolitan area as adjunct faculty. Drew's public service role was also expanded during Oxnam's presidency by the formation of a division of special programs and continuing education for the general public and the offering of about 250 free public events annually, including major conferences on such matters as futuristics, regional planning, and the environment, and academic consultation on hermeneutics and civil religion. The New Jersey Shakespeare Festival and offices for the Arts Councils were relocated to Drew, the affiliation with the Colonial Symphony was continued, and the University received the New Jersey Drama Critics Association community service award for its support of the Festival.

As president, Oxnam spoke out strongly on behalf of civil rights, academic freedom, and an end to the war in Vietnam, even at times when these ideas were not especially popular among the general public. Faculty groups occasionally disagreed with him on various issues, but Oxnam received multiple tributes from students and faculty, praising his "humanity, vision and wise leadership," and thanking him for "encouraging broader dialogue with students, opening avenues of discussion with trustees, establishing a fair and equitable judicial system," and, through it all, "maintaining fairness and equanimity."

Once the archery champion of both New York and Massachusetts, Oxnam was also an active skier, fencer, cyclist, and sail boating and scuba diving enthusiast, and served on the U.S. Olympic Committee from 1962 to 1966. He was a widely traveled student of international affairs and widely read student of history, a traveler, professional actor,

amateur gardener and photographer, private pilot, radio announcer, carpenter and craftsman, Sunday School teacher, Parent-Teacher Association officer, and den father.

His resignation came suddenly after the discovery of a fatal malignancy during a hospital stay for the flu. Shortly after his departure in June, Oxnam was named Drew's first and only chancellor. He passed away on July 19, 1974.

Scope and Content Note

The Robert Fisher Oxnam Papers provide insight into the personal side of Drew University's eighth president. He held the position from 1962 to 1974, resigning only after the diagnosis of a serious illness in June 1974. The collection materials were generated in the United States and in Wiesbaden, Germany, where Oxnam was stationed during World War II.

This collection includes a journal and scrapbooks compiled while he served in the United States Army and working at Boston University and Syracuse University; correspondence and speeches from Oxnam's time as president of the Pratt Institute and Drew University.

Arrangement

The Robert Fisher Oxnam Papers are arranged into three series:

Series 1: Bound Volumes, 1941-1957

Series 2: Pratt Institute, 1950-1961

Series 3: Drew University, 1961-2001

 Subseries A: Papers and Photographs

 Subseries B: Alternative Mediums

Access and Use

Access

The Robert Fisher Oxnam Papers collection is available for research.

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information

One photocopy may be made of each document for the purpose of research. Permission to publish must be obtained from the Drew University Archivist. Researcher responsible for further copyright restrictions.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements

The Robert Fisher Oxnam Papers collection contains 10 reel-to-reels.

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition

The Robert Fisher Oxnam Papers collection was donated in August 2004 by Dr. Oxnam's widow, Mrs. Dalys Oxnam Jaecker.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials

Drew University holds several related collections:
President's Office Papers from 1867 to the present

People and Events photograph collection (finding aid: http://depts.drew.edu/lib/archives/index_history.php)

George Eberhardt Audio Collection, which contains Oxnam's speeches and other audio material of events during his tenure at Drew University.

Processing and Other Information

Processing Information

This collection was processed by Anna Henderson in April 2007. The finding aid was written by Anna Henderson in April 2007.

Descriptive Rules Used

Finding aid content follows the guidelines suggested by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

Language

English

Notes

Newspaper articles were photocopied for preservation purposes. Photographs were removed from photo albums and placed in mylar sleeves.

Preferred Citation

Identification of item; Date (if noted); Robert Fisher Oxnam Papers, Box and Folder Number; University Archives, Drew University Library, Madison, New Jersey.

Subject Headings

Oxnam, G. Bromley (Garfield Bromley), 1891-1963.

Oxnam, Robert Fisher.

Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972.

Boston University.

De Pauw University.

Drew University.

Pratt Institute.

Syracuse University.

United States. Army.

University of Southern California.

Civil rights.

Clergy.

College presidents.
Methodism.
Vietnam.
World War II.
Correspondence.
Photographs.
Sound recordings.

Contents List

Series 1: Bound Volumes, 1941-1957

Series Description

The Bound Volumes Series contains Oxnam's Master's thesis in Political Science from the University of Southern California, and a journal and scrapbooks containing detailed information from Oxnam's service in the United States Army during World War II, and his tenure at Syracuse University and Boston University.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

Title	Date
Journal	1941
<i>The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938: A New Frontier in Labor History</i>	June 1942
Scrapbook, United States Army	1942-1943
Scrapbook, United States Army	1944-1945
Scrapbook, United States Army	1945-1946
Scrapbook, Syracuse University	1948-1950
Scrapbook, Syracuse University	1951-1953
Scrapbook, Boston University	1953-1957

Series 2: Pratt Institute, 1950-1961

Series Description

The Pratt Institute Series provides insight into Oxnam's first stint as a university president. It includes correspondence, newspaper articles, speeches, and photographs. Some photographs were removed from albums and remain in their original order in the folder. One folder relates to Syracuse and is also included here.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

Box	Folder	Title	Date
1	1	Syracuse	1950-1960
1	2	Inauguration at the Pratt Institute	1957
1	3	Congratulatory Letters, A-L	1957

1	4	Congratulatory Letters, M-Z	1957
1	5	Administrative File	1957-1960
1	6	Work at the Pratt Institute	1957-1961
1	7	Speeches	1957
1	8	Speeches	1958
1	9	Speeches	1959
1	10	Speeches	1960
1	11	Photo album contents	1957-1961
1	12	Photographs	1957-1961
1	13	Departure from the Pratt Institute	1961
1	14	Miscellaneous	undated

Series 3: Drew University, 1961-2001

Series Description

The Drew University Series documents Oxnam's activities while serving as president of the university. It includes correspondence, newspaper articles, reel-to-reels and other documentation of Drew events. The collection includes many photographs; some were loose in the collection, while the majority were arranged in photo albums. They have been removed from the albums for preservation and remain in their original order within their respective files. The series has been divided into two subseries: Subseries A includes papers and photographs; and Subseries B includes alternative medium items, such as a platter and reel-to-reels. The HMS Pinafore reel-to-reels have been digitized and are currently located on G:\Special Collections & Archives Department\Digitization.

Arrangement

Subseries A arranged chronologically. Subseries B arranged by medium.

Box	Folder	Title	Date
Subseries A: Papers and Photographs			
2	1	Newspaper clippings	1959, undated
2	2	Administrative File	1960, undated
2	3	Inauguration at Drew University	1961
2	4	Congratulatory Letters	1961
2	5	Public Speaking and Publications	1961-1971, undated
2	6	Drew Speeches	1961-1973
2	7	The Great Swamp of Morristown, NJ	1962-1964
2	8	Student Activism	1962-1970
2	9	Sympathy letters regarding the death of G. Bromley Oxnam	1963
2	10	The Barber Affair	1963-1964
2	11	Little Brook Farm Convention Center	1964
2	12	The Mellon Affair	1965
2	13	Honorary Degree from Norwich University	1966
2	14	The Ranson Affair	1967
2	15	Correspondence	1967-1975

2	16	Illness and Resignation	1974
2	17	Obituaries and Memorials	1974-1975
2	18	Oxnam Awards and Chairmanships	1974, undated
2	19	Correspondence with Dalys Oxnam Jaecker	1974-2001
3	1	Miscellaneous	1963-1975
3	2	Prayer Books	undated
3	3	Photographs	undated
3	4	Photo Album #1	undated
3	5	Photo Album #2	undated
3	6	Photo Album #3	undated
3	7	Photo Album #4	undated
3	8	Photo Album #5	undated
3	9	Photo Album #6	undated
3	10	Photo Album #7	undated
3	11	Photo Album #8	undated
3	12	Photo Album #9 copies	undated
3	13	Photo Album #9 contents	undated
3	14	2 Photographs: Harry S. Truman with G. Bromley Oxnam	March 7, 1946

Subseries B: Alternative Mediums

4	1	Round platter with Drew University crest	undated
4	2	Framed membership certificate to Drew University's New Founders Society awarded to Dalys Oxnam Jaecker	undated
4	Reel-to-reel	Highlights of Robert Fisher Oxnam Addresses	1961-1966
4	Reel-to-reel	Highlights of Robert Fisher Oxnam Addresses	1966-1974
4	Reel-to-reel	"The Methodist Layman on the Frontier"	March 1961
4	Reel-to-reel	Drew University Presidential Inaugural Ceremony	October 1961
4	Reel-to-reel	The Cooper Union Forum	March 1962
4	Reel-to-reel	Meeting with College Student Body	October 1965
4	Reel-to-reel	HMS Pinafore, Act I (featuring Oxnam's daughter)	August 1968
4	Reel-to-reel	HMS Pinafore, Act II (featuring Oxnam's daughter)	August 1968
4	Reel-to-reel	Oxnam's Memorial Service at Drew University	September 1974
4	Reel-to-reel	President Oxnam's Commencement Address	undated