Laurence Belmont Dixon Papers

**Descriptive Summary**

**Creator:** Dixon, Laurence Belmont, 1870-1953

**Title:** Laurence Belmont Dixon Papers,

**Date (inclusive):** 1893-1944

**Extent:** 0.40 linear feet (1 archives box, 1 card file box)

**Abstract:** Papers of Laurence Belmont Dixon, electrical engineer and amateur photographer. The collection consists primarily of materials documenting Dixon's travels in Japan in 1905, including a large group of photographs and a personal diary. Also included in the collection is an album of Dixon's photographs of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) and a short history of the Dixon family. The materials are arranged in three series: 1) WRITINGS, 2) MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS and 3) PHOTOGRAPHS.

**Repository:** University of California, San Diego. Geisel Library. Mandeville Special Collections Library.

La Jolla, California 92093-0175

**Collection number:** MSS 0049

**Language of Material:** Collection materials in English

**Access**

Collection is open for research.

**Acquisition Information**

Not Available

**Preferred Citation**

Laurence Belmont Dixon Papers, MSS 0049. Mandeville Special Collections Library, UCSD.

**Publication Rights**

Publication rights are held by the creator of the collection.

**Biography**

Laurence Belmont Dixon was born on August 16, 1870 in Chicago, Illinois. His father, Laban Beecher Dixon (1834-1912), was a prosperous architect and businessman. The family lived in various locations in the Chicago area, finally settling in 1877 in a home they built on the city's South Side.

Dixon graduated from Boston Technical School in 1893 with a degree in electrical engineering. In that year he visited the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. After traveling in the southwestern U.S., Dixon returned to Chicago in 1894 to work for the Western Electric Company. He began by assembling and testing dynamos in the shop, moved up to the engineering department as a designer, and finally took a position on the executive staff.

In 1905, at the age of thirty-five, Dixon took a trip to Japan with his father. Arriving shortly after the end of the Russo-Japanese War, their visit lasted from September 12 to November 14. Landing in Yokahama, they ranged from the northern end of Hoshu Island to the town of Kochi on the southern island of Shikoku. In between, they visited Nikko, Sendai, Matsushima, Ihao, Haruna, Miyanoshita, Toba, Tokyo, Nara, Kyoto, and Kotohera. They travelled by train, but also by ricksha, sedan chair and on foot. They stayed at local inns, visited geisha houses, and took in the surrounding sights--temples, street scenes, landscapes, and people.

Dixon left Western Electric in 1909 and moved to Riverside, California, with his first wife, Margaret. There the Dixon's had two sons, Robert and Richard. Margaret Dixon died in 1926, and the family moved to Del Mar, California, in 1927. During World War II, Dixon organized a twenty-four hour aircraft warning system in Del Mar, and he lectured on the Japanese national character.

Besides Dixon's formal career in electrical engineering, he was also an accomplished photographer, jeweller, woodworker, and bookbinder. He died on July 20, 1953 in Del Mar, California.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

Accession Processed in 1990

The Laurence Dixon Papers consist primarily of materials created during Dixon's trip to Japan in 1905. The materials are organized in three series: 1) WRITINGS, 2) MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS and 3) PHOTOGRAPHS.

The WRITINGS series contains three works by Dixon, beginning with a short family history produced approximately ten years before his death. The second and most significant item is a leather-bound diary written by Dixon on his 1905 trip to Japan. It contains brief holograph entries noting itinerary, experiences of interest, places, and people encountered. Unfortunately, his brief notes provide little descriptive narrative, although his travels are richly documented in the photographs he took. The final item in the series is an essay on Japan which Dixon read at the Torrey Pines Lodge in 1944.
The MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS contain Dixon's obituary from the San Dieguito Citizen and his translation of several Japanese characters.

The most significant materials in the PHOTOGRAPH series, and indeed the entire collection, are the photographs taken during Dixon's trip to Japan. The photographs number over one hundred and seventy images, all black and white contact prints made from medium format nitrate images. The photographs are organized according to the itinerary outlined in Dixon's diary, and based on the descriptions on the verso side of each image. Images without descriptions are placed at the end of the subseries. The images are unique because Dixon and his father travelled the countryside, avoided Europeanized areas, and interacted, often intimately, with the Japanese people.

In addition to the photographs of Japan, Dixon created an album with images of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which opened in 1893. Included are images of buildings and parkscapes.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

**Subjects**

Dixon family -- Archives  
Japan -- Description and travel  
Japan -- Pictorial works  
Diaries -- 20th Century.  
Photographs -- 20th century.

**WRITINGS**

- box 1, folder 1  
  Brief history of my family  
  1944  

- box 1, folder 2  
  Diary of Japanese Trip  
  1905 - 1905  

- box 1, folder 3  
  Japan  
  Note  
  Laurence Dixon read this paper on July 16, 1944 to a group at the Torrey Pines Lodge.

**MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS**

- box 1, folder 4  
  Obituary  
  Note  
  From the SAN DIEGUITO CITIZEN.

- box 1, folder 5  
  Translations of Japanese characters

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

- box 1, folder 6  
  Portrait of Laurence Dixon  
  1905 - 1905  

- box 1, folder 7  
  Chicago World's Fair  
  Note  
  Black and white contact prints, mounted in bound album.

- box 2, folder 1  
  Trip to Japan  
  1905 - 1905  
  Note  
  Black and white contact prints.