

Guide to the Collection on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Women's Laboratory, 1867-1922 AC.0298

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Summary Information

Repository	Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Institute Archives and Special Collections
Creator	Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Women's Laboratory
Title	Collection on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Women's Laboratory
Date [bulk]	Bulk, 1873-1883
Date [inclusive]	1867-1922
Extent	0.3 cubic feet (1 manuscript box)
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Ellen Swallow Richards, the first woman awarded a degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with the generous cooperation of the Women's Education Association of Boston which purchased microscopes and other apparatus, worked to establish a laboratory for women to study chemical analysis, mineralogy, and chemistry in space provided by MIT. According to the October 1876 announcement, "The courses are intended for such as may be able to devote their whole time to the work, as well as those who, by reason of other engagements, can spend only a few hours a week in the laboratories." Fees for an eight-month term were \$200 for attendance six days per week, \$80 for two days per week, and \$45 for one day per week. The Women's Laboratory formally opened in November 1876 with Professor John M. Ordway in charge, assisted by Ellen Richards. The laboratory began with 23 students, many of whom were public school teachers. During its seven years of operation the laboratory served more than 500 women students. The Women's Laboratory closed in 1883</p>

when MIT opened a building containing new laboratory space and all chemistry instruction was integrated into the regular curriculum. The collection consists of correspondence, reports, and writings concerning the formation, funding, and operation of the Women's Laboratory; annual and summary reports; and reports of accomplishments and activities of graduates. The principal correspondent is Ellen Swallow Richards; other correspondents include Francis Amasa Walker, president of MIT, and Susan Minns, class of 1881.

Citation

Collection on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Women's Laboratory, AC 298. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Institute Archives and Special Collections, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Historical note

Ellen Swallow Richards, the first woman awarded a degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with the generous cooperation of the Women's Education Association of Boston which purchased microscopes and other apparatus, worked to establish a laboratory for women to study chemical analysis, mineralogy, and chemistry in space provided by MIT. According to the October 1876 announcement, "The courses are intended for such as may be able to devote their whole time to the work, as well as those who, by reason of other engagements, can spend only a few hours a week in the laboratories." Fees for an eight-month term were \$200 for attendance six days per week, \$80 for two days per week, and \$45 for one day per week. The Women's Laboratory formally opened in November 1876 with Professor John M. Ordway in charge, assisted by Ellen Richards. The laboratory began with 23 students, many of whom were public school teachers. During its seven years of operation the laboratory served more than 500 women students. The Women's Laboratory closed in 1883 after the MIT Corporation voted "that in view of the facilities afforded by the new chemical laboratories, and in pursuance of the wishes of the benefactors of the Woman's Laboratory, the present so-called Woman's Laboratory will be discontinued and students will be admitted to the Kidder Laboratories without distinction of sex." Ellen Richards received thanks from the Corporation for her service in November 1883. Later the next year, in April 1884, she was formally appointed assistant under Professor Nichols to give instruction in a course of sanitary chemistry. Her salary of \$600 per annum was raised in May 1884 to \$1,000 per annum, for a year's trial of the course, a course she continued to teach at the Institute for many years.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Institute Archives and Special Collections

Revision Description

2011

Access note

The collection is open for research.

Intellectual Property Rights

Access to collections in the Institute Archives and Special Collections is not authorization to publish. Separate written application for permission to publish must be made to the Institute Archives.

Related Materials

Related Materials in the Institute Archives and Special Collections

Mind and Hand: The Birth of MIT, by Julius A. Stratton and Loretta H. Mannix. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005.

Francis Amasa Walker Papers (MC 298)

[Collection on Ellen Swallow Richards](#) (MC 659)

[Online exhibit about Ellen Swallow Richards](#)

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Women's Laboratory
- Women's Educational Association of Boston

Personal Name(s)

- Richards, Ellen H. (Ellen Henrietta), 1842-1911

Subject(s)

- Chemistry--Study and teaching.
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology--History.
- Women scientists.
- Women--Education (Higher)--History.

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