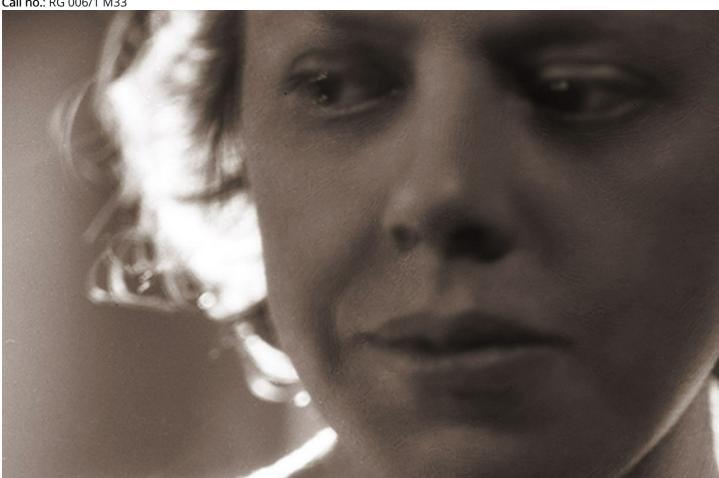
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William L. Machmer Papers

1899-1955 (*Bulk:* 1924-1953) 18 boxes (9.0 linear ft.) **Call no.**: RG 006/1 M33



About SCUA SCUA home Credo digital Scope

Series 1. Subject files

Series 2. Departments

Inventory

Overview

Series 1. Subject files

Series 2. Departments

Admin info

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Read collection overview

Enjoying one of the longest tenures of any administrator in the history of the University of Massachusetts, William Lawson Machmer served under five presidents across 42 years, helping to guide the university through an economic depression, two world wars, and three name changes. During his years as Dean, Machmer witnessed the growth of the university from fewer than 500 students to almost 3,800, and helped guide its transformation from a small agricultural college into Massachusetts State College (1931) and finally into the University of Massachusetts (1947).

Machmer's papers chronicle the fitful development of the University of Massachusetts from the days of Kenyon Butterfield's innovations of the 1920s through the time of the GI Bill. The collection is particularly strong in documenting the academic experience of students and the changes affecting the various departments and programs at the University, with particular depth for the period during and after the Second World War.

See similar SCUA collections:

Education
Mass Agricultural College (1863-1931)
Mass State College (1931-1947)
UMass (1947-)
UMass administration
UMass faculty
UMass students
World War II

Background on William L. Machmer

Enjoying one of the longest tenures of any administrator in the history of the University of Massachusetts, William Lawson Machmer served under five presidents across 42 years, helping to guide the university through an economic depression, two world wars, and three name changes. During his years as Dean, Machmer witnessed the growth of the university from fewer than 500 students to almost 3,800, and helped guide its transformation from a small agricultural college into Massachusetts State College (1931) and finally into the University of Massachusetts (1947).

Born in Moselem, Pa., on January 30, 1883, Machmer was trained as a teacher at Keystone State Normal School before receiving both his bachelors and masters degrees in languages (Latin and Greek) from Franklin and Marshall College. Having gained experience teaching for several years in the public school system in Pennsylvania and at the Franklin and Marshall Academy, Machmer was brought to Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1911 as instructor of mathematics, one of a small crop of younger faculty brought in to build the curriculum. Well regarded throughout the college and a favorite of the students, Machmer rose steadily up the academic ladder and in 1921, he was chosen by President Kenyon Butterfield to become Assistant Dean, followed four years later by his promotion to Dean.



William L. Machmer.

For nearly thirty years, Machmer was centrally involved in the academic affairs of campus. Although many of the curricular innovations and reforms introduced by Butterfield were never fully realized, Machmer was a steadfast advocate of raising academic standards, and he was highly effective in dealing with the changes brought by the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the return of war veterans in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as well as the gradual shift in emphasis away from agricultural education toward the liberal arts and sciences. As a close advisor to the college president, he oversaw both the curriculum and the student body, writing that philosophically, he wished to emphasize the "development of the complete individual," including the mental, physical, social, and moral aspects.

As Machmer grew into the Dean's role, he took part in a number of regional and national organizations and initiatives, including the federal survey of Land Grant Colleges and Universities in 1928, the Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities, the American Conference on Academic Deans, and the Eastern Association of Deans and Advisors of Men. Although his teaching load was reduced by his administrative responsibilities, he remained active as well in the Department of Mathematics, serving as Department head from 1935-1940. Outside the University, his slate was no less full. Deeply involved in the Amherst community, he took an interest generally in educational and Congregational Church matters, heading the Parent-Teachers Association and the Amherst School Committee at various times, and working with the local Democratic Party and the Masonic fraternity.

On January 24, 1953, less than a month after retiring from the University, Machmer died of a heart attack while fighting a grass fire at his summer home at Chequesett Bluff, Wellfleet, Mass. In 1956, a new classroom building was named Machmer Hall in his honor.

Scope of collection

The papers of long-time Dean of the University William L. Machmer chronicle the fitful development of UMass Amherst from the presidency of Kenyon Butterfield just after the turn of the twentieth century until the time of the GI Bill. During his tenure, Machmer helped the university weather the effects of two World Wars and the Great Depression, and to navigate the changes as

it evolved first into Massachusetts State College and then into the University of Massachusetts. Throughout, he was a humane and effective voice for high academic standards and for the life of the student.

Machmer's papers contain information on student academic achievement, educational expectations and challenges, and the efforts of the university to take part in regional and national organizations. As such, the collection offers a perspective on the evolution of thinking at the University during the transition from a narrowly defined mission as an agricultural college into a more broadly conceived liberal arts curriculum. Of particular interest is the relatively large quantity of material relating to the adjustments at the university during and after World War II and the efforts to meet the demand of returning veterans. The collection includes substantial information on the organization of courses at Fort Devens and Westover Air Force Base; statistics, letters, and other documents relating to returning veterans; and (especially in Series 2) information on the adaptation of the individual academic units at the university.

Series descriptions

Series 1. Subject files 1899-1955 8.0 linear feet

The bulk of the subject files in Series 1 pertains to Machmer's activities as Dean at the University of Massachusetts during the 1920s through 1953, and particularly his oversight of the changing curriculum and student academic success. From the controversy over introducing an BA degree (as opposed to the BS formerly granted to agricultural students) to the introduction of new ideas in how best to serve the citizens of the Commonwealth, the series documents the slow and sometimes agonizing reorganization of the university.

Machmer was a strong proponent of student academic standards, and his files from his work on the Scholarship Committee (reviewing the academic standing of students), his annual reports as Dean, statistical summaries of student standing, and reports from various other committees provides a sense of academic life at the university during the 1930s and 1940s. To a lesser degree, the series also documents aspects of student non-academic life.

The impact of World War II on the University can be seen throughout the series in terms of the dramatic impact on a student body mobilizing for war and the equally dramatic impact of integrating veterans back into the university following demobilization. Of particular note are a fine series of letters written by former Mass. State students in the service (filed under "Letters from soldiers") and a poignant file of requests from Japanese American students from the western states seeking to continue their education. In most cases, Machmer responded to say that while the university was willing to admit Japanese American students, the already strained facilities at Mass. State would not permit them to admit additional out of state students.

Series 2. Departments

1937-1952

1.0 linear feet

Series 2 contains an effective snapshot of the state of the academic departments at UMass, concentrated in period 1950-1952, when the university was experiencing an influx of returning veterans from World War II. The files provide some insight into the efforts of each department, often with mixed success, to meet the educational demands of the post-war generation and their efforts to innovate or adapt the curriculum.

Inventory

Series 1. Subject files 1899-1955 8.0 linear feet A.B. material 1936-1939 3 folders Box 1: 1-3

A.B. degree, Trustee Committee

1937-1938

Box 1: 4

A.B. degree, Trustees' reaction to degree proposal

1937-1938

Box 1: 5

Accreditation 1947-1951 Box 1:6 Academic credit for men in armed service 1943-1945 Box 1: 7 Academics 1934-1946 Box 1:8 Addresses 1941-1947 Box 1:9 Addresses and introductions 1930-1951 4 folders Box 1: 10-13 Administrative expenses, Dean Lewis 1919-1921 Box 1: 14 Adult education 1927-1929 Box 2: 1 Agricultural controversy and committee on biography 1945 Box 2: 2 Agricultural education 1912-1924 Box 2: 3 Alumni 1921-1947 Box 2: 4 American Bankers Association 1944-1946 Box 2: 5 American Conference on Academic Deans 1947-1952 Box 2: 6 **Annual Reports** 1919-1948 3 folders Box 2: 7-9 **Annual Reports** 1919-1929 Box 1: 7 **Annual Reports** 1930-1939 Box 1:8 **Annual Reports** 1940-1948 Box 1:9 **Armistice Day** 1945 Box 2: 10 Army Specialized Training Reserve Program 1943-1946 Box 3: 1-3 Association of American Colleges

1941-1948 Box 2: 11 Association of Institutional Business officers of New England Educational Institutions 1921 Box 2: 12 Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities 1928-1943 2 folders Box 2: 13-14 Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities 1928-1943 Box 2: 13 Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities 1944/1946 Box 2: 14 **Athletics** 1935-1940 Box 3: 4 Bachelor degrees 1945 Box 3: 5 Baker, Hugh P. 1933-1947 12 folders Box 3: 6-17 Baker, Hugh P. 1933 Box 3: 6 Baker, Hugh P. 1934-1935 Box 3: 7 Baker, Hugh P. 1936-1937 Box 3: 8 Baker, Hugh P. 1938 Box 3: 9 Baker, Hugh P. 1939 Box 3: 10 Baker, Hugh P. 1940 Box 3: 11 Baker, Hugh P. 1941 Box 3: 12 Baker, Hugh P. 1942 Box 3: 13 Baker, Hugh P. 1943-1944 Box 3: 14 Baker, Hugh P. 1945 Box 3: 15 Baker, Hugh P. 1946 Box 3: 16 Baker, Hugh P. 1947

Box 3: 17

Band

1933-1940

Box 4: 1

Boston University Institute on Post-War Problem

1944-1946

Box 4: 2

Brochures and programs

1916-1936

Box 4: 3

Budget

1909-1920

Box 4: 4

Building program

1929

Box 4: 5

Building wardens

1941

Box 4: 6

Buildings

1915, 1935

Box 4: 7

Burnham and Flint Contest

1946, 1951

Box 4: 8

Butterfield, Kenyon L.

1906-1924

Box 4: 9

B.V.A. degree

1929-1943

Box 4: 10

Campus guide

1926

Box 4: 11

Campus planning

1935, 1940

Box 4: 12

Certification out of state

1928-1934

Box 4: 13

Classroom and laboratory accommodations

Undated

Box 4: 14

College calendar

1932/1948

Box 4: 15

College colors

1947

Box 4: 16

College Entrance Examination Board

1939-1951

4 folders

Box 4: 17-20

Collegian

1934-1952

Box 5: 1

Collegian publishing board

1949-1952

Box 5: 2

Collegian Quarterly

1941-1945 Box 5: 3 Commencements 1922-1938 14 folders Box 5-6: Commencements 1922-1924 Box 5: 4 Commencements 1925-1929 Box 5: 5 Commencements 1930-1932 Box 5: 6 Commencements 1933-1934 Box 5: 7 Commencements 1935-1936 Box 5: 8 Commencements 1937-1938 Box 5: 9 Commencements 1939 Box 6: 1 Commencements 1940 Box 6: 2 Commencements 1941-1942 Box 6: 3 Commencements 1943-1944 Box 6: 4 Commencements 1945-1946 Box 6: 5 Commencements 1947 Box 6: 6 Commencements 1948 Box 6: 7 Commencements 1949 Box 6: 8 Connecticut Valley Scientific Conference 1931-1953 Box 6: 9 Convocations 1945-1947 Box 6: 10 Correspondence 1922-1949

Correspondence 1922-1949 2 folders Box 7: 1-2 Correspondence 1922-1929 Box 7: 1 Correspondence 1933-1949 Box 7: 2 Correspondence course Undated Box 7: 3 Cost of instruction 1921 Box 7: 4 Council of Churches. Town and Country Department 1938-1944 Box:5 Course of study 1931-1947 10 folders Box 7-8: Course of study 1931-1934 Box 7: 6 Course of study 1935-1936 Box 7: 7 Course of study 1937 Box 7: 8 Course of study 1938 Box 7: 9 Course of study 1939-1940 Box 7: 10 Course of study 1941 Box 7: 11 Course of study 1942 Box 7: 12 Course of study 1943-1944 Box 8: 1 Course of study 1945-1946 Box 8: 2 Course of study 1947 Box 8: 3 Curriculum study 1933-1934 Box 8: 4 Dad's Day 1936-1938 Box 8: 5 Degrees 1949 Box 8: 6 Department heads 1933-1945

Box 8: 7

Department of the Interior: Occupational guidance

1937-1942

Box 8: 8

Diamond Jubilee

1938

Box 8: 9

Discipline Committee

1928-1942

Box 8: 10

Dormitories

1932-1939

Box 8: 11

Eastern Association of College Deans and Advisors of Men

1940-1951

Box 8: 12

Eastern Colleges Science Conference

1950-1951

Box 8: 13

Eligibility rules

1921-1930

Box 8: 14

English Association

1949-1950

Box 8: 15

Enrollment statistics

1916-1946

Box 8: 16

Entrance examination: English

1943

Box 8: 17

Experiment Station

1934-1936

Box 8: 18

Faculty advisors

1947

Box 8: 19

Faculty and staff

1920-1942

Box 8: 20

Faculty Club

1935-1948

Box 8: 21

Faculty meetings

1941-1942

Box 8: 22

Faculty teaching load

1944-1949

Box 8: 23

Faculty vacancies

1951

Box 8: 24

Farewell to Bay State

Undated

Box 9: 1

Fine Arts

1933-1938

Box 9: 2

Financial aid

Box 9: 3

Fire wardens

1941

Box 9: 4

Food Committee

1947-1948

Box 9: 5

Fort Devens

1946-1950

11 folders

Box 9: 6-16

Fort Devens: Business administration

1947-1948

Box 9: 6

Fort Devens: Creative arts

1948-1949 Box 9: 7

Fort Devens: Curriculum

1947-1948 Box 9: 8

Fort Devens: Engineering

1947-1948 Box 9: 9

Fort Devens: Faculty

1946-1949 Box 9: 10

Fort Devens: Massachusetts State College, folder 1

1946-1949 Box 9: 11

Fort Devens: Massachusetts State College, folder 2

1946-1949 Box 9: 12

Fort Devens: News releases

1946-1948 Box 9: 13

Fort Devens: Report

1947-1949 Box 9: 14

Fort Devens: Statistics

1947-1950 Box 9: 15

Fort Devens: Transfer problems

1947-1948 Box 9: 16

4-H Camp

1951 Box 9: 17 Fraternities 1909-1947

Box 9: 18

Freshman handbook

1939-1947 Box 9: 19

Freshman scholars

1940 Box 9: 20

Freshman science requirements

1948

Box 9: 21 Freshman statistics 1936-1938 Box 10: 1 Freshman week 1947-1948 Box 10: 2 Gallant, James F. 1920-1925 Box 10: 3 Goldberg, Maxwell 1945 Box 10: 4 Grades 1943 Box 10: 5 Graduate school 1944-1952 Box 10: 6 Hillside School 1947-1952 Box 10: 7 Higher Education in the Commonwealth 1940 Box 10: 8 High School day 1935-1941 Box 10: 9 High School preparation 1937-1938 Box 10: 10 Honor system 1940-1945 Box 10: 11 Housing and sanitation 1933 Box 10: 12 Housing for women 1933 Box 10: 13 Index 1937-1941 Box 10: 14 Insignia Chapel (Awards for academic activities) 1928-1937 Interchange of students between Valley colleges 1939 Box 10: 16 Interchurch Council 1928-1931 Box 10: 17 Japanese-American students 1942-1944 Box 10: 18 Journalism

Land Grant Colleges

1944 Box 10: 19 1928-1951 Box 10: 20 Legislature 1946 Box 10: 21 Letters from students in the service 1942-1945 Box 10: 22 Lewis, Edward M. 1923-1936 3 folders Box 11: 1-3 Lewis, Edward M. Dean of MAC 1923-1936 Box 11: 1 Lewis, Edward M. Correspondence Undated Box 11: 2 Lewis, Edward M. President of MAC 1924-1927 Box 11: 3 Liberal Arts, School of. Minutes of meetings 1939-1955 2 folders Box 11: 4-5 Liberal Arts, School of. Minutes of meetings 1939-1948 Box 11: 4 Liberal Arts, School of. Minutes of meetings 1949-1955 Box 11:5 Library 1923-1941 Box 11: 6 Lotta agricultural loans 1931-1943 Box 11: 7 Machmer, William: Diploma from Franklin and Marshall College 1907 Framed item Machmer, William: caricature of Dean Machmer, by Pol 1942 Framed item Maroon Key Society 1939-1940 Box 11:8 Mass Action 1928-1929 Box 11: 9 Mass. State College: Origin and scope 1940 Box 11: 10 Mass. State College: Departmental descriptions 1933-1945 Box 11:11 Miscellaneous (background info, memors, reports)

1919-1945 Box 12: 1 Mountain Day

Box 12: 2

National Conference of College and University Presidents

1942

Box 12: 3

New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools

1931-1952

2 folders

Box 12: 4-5

New England Educational Institutions: Deans Association

1939-1952

Box 12: 6

New England Educational Institutions: Council

1944-1948

Box 12: 7

News Service

1937

Box 12: 8

New York registration

1928-1947

Box 12: 9

October conference

1944-1948

Box 12: 10

Patents, Committee on

1935

Box 12: 11

Phi Kappa Phi

1930-1937

Box 12: 12

Regulations, Academic

1940

Box 13: 1

Regulations, Non-academic

1933-1947

Box 13: 2

Religious activities

1899-1937

Box 13: 3

Religious activities: Finances

1923-1952

3 folders

Box 13: 4-6

Religious activities: Finances

1923-1945

Box 13: 4

Religious activities: Finances

1941-1942

Box 13: 5

Religious activities: Finances

1943-1952

Box 13: 6

Religious Advisory Board

1937-1947

Box 13: 7

Religious denomination statistics

1926-1947

Box 13: 8

Religious Director (W. B. Easton)

Box 13: 9

Resident teaching

1937

Box 13: 10

ROTC

1941-1945

Box 13: 11

ROTC Regional Conference Northeast

1947

Box 13: 12

Salary standardization

1919

Box 14: 1

Scholarship Committee

1910-1947

Box 14: 2-9

Scholarship Committee

1910-1914

Box 14: 2

Scholarship Committee

1912-1915

Box 14: 3

Scholarship Committee

1916-1918

Box 14: 4

Scholarship Committee

1919-1921

Box 14: 5

Scholarship Committee

1922-1924

Box 14: 6

Scholarship Committee

1925-1933

Box 14: 7

Scholarship Committee

1934-1940

Box 14: 8

Scholarship Committee

1941-1947

Box 14: 9

Scholarship Day

1934-1939

Box 14: 10

Scholarship Day

1940-1946

Box 14: 11

Short courses

1935-1941

Box 14: 12

Skinner, Edna L.

1924-1934

Box 15: 1

Slogan contest

1923

Box 15: 2

Special Planning Committee

1947

Box 15: 3

Spring Day

1947-1949

Box 15: 4

State Relationship Report

1934

Box 15: 5

Statistics: New England Colleges

1941

Box 15: 6

Steffanides,. George F.

1933

Box 15: 7

Stone, Harlan Fiske

1941

Box 15: 8

Student Christian Association

1945-1949

Box 15: 9

Student employment statistics

1937-1941

Box 15: 10

Student government constitution

1948

Box 15: 11

Student Health Service

1946

Box 15: 12

Student life

1938-1950

Box 15: 13

Student tax

1932-1949

Box 15: 14

Swimming pool agreement

Undated

Box 15: 15

Teacher evaluations

1949

Box 15: 16

Teacher training

1927-1945

Box 15: 17

Teacher principles

1937

Box 15: 18

Tenure

1948

Box 15: 19

Thatcher Hall

1938

Box 15: 20

Tobacco Farm

1947

Box 15: 21

Torch Clubs

1942

Box 15: 22

Treasurer (Robert Hawley)

1942-1950

Box 15: 23

Tuition

1950

Box 15: 24

United Religious Council

1928-1946

3 folders

Box 15-16:

United Religious Council

1928-1937

Box 15: 25

United Religious Council

1938-1939

Box 15: 26

United Religious Council

1940-1946

Box 16: 1

University of Western Massachusetts

1944

Box 16: 2

Van Meter, Ralph A.

1947-1954

Box 16: 3

Vocational guidance

1916-1921

Box 16: 4

Waugh, Frank A.

1937-1939

Box 16: 5

Westover Air Force Base

1940-1950

Box 16: 6

Winter Carnival

1937-1938

Box 16: 7

World Aggie Night

1923

Box 16: 8

World War II: Accelerated credit

1941-1944

Box 16: 9

World War II: College War Information Service

1940-1945

Box 16: 10

World War II: Commemoration services

1945

Box 16: 11

World War II: Committee of College and Post-War Period

1944

Box 16: 12

World War II: Military credit

1944

Box 16: 13

World War II: Veterans

1937-1946

Box 16: 14

World War II: Victory Farm Volunteer Program

1944

Box 16: 15

World War II: War agricultural curricula 1945 Box 16: 16 Ynkhorne 1926 Box 16: 17 Series 2. Departments 1937-1952 1.0 linear feet Agricultural Engineering 1945-1947 Box 17: 1 Agriculture 1946 Box 17: 2 Arts and Sciences 1952 Box 17: 3 Bacteriology 1948-1951 Box 17: 4 Botany 1945-1952 Box 17: 5 **Business Administration** 1947-1951 Box 17: 6 **Chemical Engineering** 1947 Box 17: 7 Chemistry 1946-1952 Box 17: 8 Civil Engineering 1947 Box 17: 9 **Economics** 1937-1952 Box 17: 10 Education 1945-1951 Box 17: 11 **Electrical Engineering** 1937 Box 17: 12 Engineering 1946-1950 Box 17: 13 Engineering School. Academic Standards Committee 1948-1950 Box 17: 14 English 1947-1951 Box 17: 15 Entomology 1945-1951 Box 17: 16 **Extension Service** 1946-1950

Box 17: 17

Fine Arts

1945-1951

Box 17: 18

Food Technology

1945

Box 17: 19

Forestry

1947-1950

Box 17: 20

Geology and Mineralogy

1941-1949

Box 17: 21

German

1951

Box 17: 22

Government

1949-1951

Box 17: 23

History

1949-1951

Box 17: 24

Home Economics

1945-1952

Box 17: 25

Horticulture

1948

Box 17: 26

Industrial Engineering

1949-1952

Box 17: 27

Journalism

1949-1952

Box 17: 28

Landscape Architecture

1947-1951

Box 18: 1

Liberal Arts

1945-1952

Box 18: 2

Mathematics

1947-1951

Box 18: 3

Mechanical Engineering

1951

Box 18: 4

Military

1947-1952

Box 18: 5

Modern Languages

1947

Box 18: 6

Nature Education

1948-1951

Box 18: 7

Philosophy

1945-1948

Box 18: 8

Physical Education

Box 18: 9

Physics

1947-1950

Box 18: 10

Pomology

1947

Box 18: 11

Pre-Medical

1944

Box 18: 12

Psychology

1950

Box 18: 13

Public Health

1947-1952

Box 18: 14

Recreational Leadership

1947-1952

Box 18: 15

Religion

1947-1950

Box 18: 16

Romance Languages

1947-1950

Box 18: 17

School of Science

1946-1951

Box 18: 18

Short Course

1947-1952

Box 18: 19

Sociology

1949

Box 18: 20

Wildlife Management

1949

Box 18: 21

Zoology and Physiology

1943-1952

Box 18: 22

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research with the exception of files containing the academic records of individual students.

Provenance

Acquired from William L. Machmer. A caricature of Dean Machmer and his diploma from Franklin and Marshall College were donated in May 2015 by his son Bill Machmer.

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Search terms

Subjects

Agricultural education

Fort Devens (Mass.)

Massachusetts Agricultural College

Massachusetts State College

University of Massachusetts Amherst

University of Massachusetts Amherst. Dean

University of Massachusetts Amherst. Department of Mathematics

World War, 1939-1945

Contributors

Machmer, William L. [main entry]

Baker, Hugh Potter, 1878-

Butterfield, Kenyon L. (Kenyon Leech), 1868-1935

Lewis, Edward M.

Van Meter, Ralph Albert, 1893-

Genres and formats

Letters (Correspondence)

Student records

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Education

Mass Agricultural College (1863-1931)

Mass State College (1931-1947)

UMass (1947-)

UMass administration

UMass faculty

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