



MCDONOGH SCHOOL

Archives & Special Collections

Guide to the Duncan Campbell Lyle Collection



Processed by Kathleen Morrison, Archives and Special Collections Associate

May 2026



McDONOGH SCHOOL

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MS-15: Duncan Campbell Lyle Collection

(5 boxes, 1.36 cubic feet)

Inclusive Dates: March 1866 – Fall 2003

Bulk Dates: 1910 – 1938

Processed by: Kathleen Morrison, Archives and Special Collections Associate, May-June 2026

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Provenance

This collection was created by multiple people/groups, including Duncan Campbell Lyle. Some materials were held by Mr. Lyle until his death. Others were gathered by subsequent school administrations and members of the DC and Baltimore Alumni Associations as a tribute to Mr. Lyle. Some materials, such as copies of the sheet music for “Tell Old Man Lyle” were donated many times over the years by different people. The documentation and original source of some of these materials is a mystery, as that information was either never recorded or has been lost over the years. Some materials are clearly documented as being Lyle’s but then were given to or added onto by other individuals: Lyle’s stamp collection, for example, has stamps that were printed after his death in 1938.

While Lyle’s possessions were noted, and while some donations were stored with letters from the donor, many other items have no clear provenance, either because that information has been lost or was never taken down in the first place.

Biography

Duncan Campbell Lyle was born on June 16, 1847, near Timber Ridge in Rockbridge County, Virginia. (Today, the area is part of the city of Lexington, VA.) Lyle’s family resided at an estate known as “Edgehill.” Lyle grew up attending the local school and the Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church. At the age of fourteen, he entered Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) and studied there until August 1864, when he took a leave of absence to join the Confederate Army. A member of the Fourth Battalion, Virginia Reserves, Lyle rose to the rank of First Lieutenant and Adjunct before Robert E. Lee’s surrender on April 9, 1865.

After the end of the war, Lyle returned to Washington College to resume his studies. He graduated from Washington College in 1869 with a Masters of the Arts and was hired by the college as Assistant

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Professor of Mathematics. However, after only a year, he was appointed Secretary of the State Board of Education of Virginia and moved to Richmond. In 1872, Lyle studied German literature and language at both Göttingen University (located in Lower Saxony) and the University of Berlin.

In July of 1873, the Board of Trustees of McDonogh School hired Col. William Allen to be the headmaster of the school. Allen, who was a professor of mathematics at Washington College from 1866 until his appointment at McDonogh, invited Lyle to be his Assistant Principal. Lyle accepted, and he would work at McDonogh from August 1873 until August 1919. As part of the administration, Lyle helped determine the shape and organization of the new school. He taught math and German to the boys, and in 1883 helped to found "The Week," McDonogh's school newspaper.

Following Allen's death in 1889, the Board appointed Lyle as headmaster of McDonogh. He served in the position for four years before asking to be replaced so that he might return to his teaching duties. He was succeeded as headmaster by Dr. James T. Edwards in the fall of 1893. He remained a key member of the school faculty despite his voluntary demotion.

Lyle was incredibly well-liked by many of the students. He assigned nicknames to many of them, and in return they nicknamed him "The Old Man." He also was known for remembering details of the boys' lives, even well after they graduated. Some alumni even wrote fondly about the paddlings he used to give them with his "pokey stick." Children were named after him – Mary Lyle Smith, daughter of fellow McDonogh teacher William Ballard Smith, Virginia Lyle Cole, and Lyle Shobe DeWitt (photos in this collection) – to list a few. His 70th birthday in 1917 was marked with a large party that began on campus and ended at the Hotel Rennert in Baltimore, and his 80th with a testimonial dinner at the prestigious Merchants' Club, also in Baltimore. Alumni enjoyed corresponding with him via letters, keeping him up to date on what was going on in their lives. Lyle would publish some of this information as "Alumni News" in The Week.

Additionally, Lyle kept scrapbooks on each boy. He would record their names, class rank, activities, and nicknames, as well cutting and pasting news clippings about them onto the blank pages. He would also sometimes tuck their letters inside the books. Some of these scrapbooks and letters survive and make up the bulk of the Vertical File Manuscript collection.

In 1919, Lyle decided to retire from McDonogh. He moved to 2420 Madison Avenue, then to 909 N. Charles St, and finally to 3 East Read St., all in Baltimore City. Writing Lyle's obituary in The Week, former student and Alumni Association member Arthur D. Thompson (Class of 1891) said "...he was ever the genial, happy and altogether delightful host to his Boys (be they old or young) who were constantly dropping in upon him singly or in pairs or groups, by day or by night..." As he aged, however, there was concern for his physical health and repeated wishes for him to return to the McDonogh campus to live were made by alumni, staff, and Headmaster Major Louis Lamborn. In 1935, at the age of 88, Lyle agreed to return and was eventually installed in a small house built on the north side of campus (no longer standing).

Lyle marked his 90th birthday in 1937 with another party, attended by alumni and faculty. He was noted as still being sharp in the mind, though noticeably frailer than he had been when he returned in 1935. After a brief illness, he died at Union Memorial Hospital on February 28th, 1938. His funeral was conducted at Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church in Baltimore on March 2, 1938, and he was interred in Taggart Chapel the same day.

Lyle never married or had any children of his own. He did keep in contact with the families of his siblings back in Timber Ridge, but by all accounts, he was dedicated to McDonogh. Even decades after his death, he remains a central figure in the story of McDonogh, having served forty-six years on campus, working for four headmasters (not including himself), and befriending hundreds of boys and their families. The Lyle Memorial Building was dedicated to him in November of 1929 and remains standing.

Scope and Content Notes

This collection is made up of five boxes of materials created by or related to Duncan Campbell Lyle. These materials were collected after Lyle's death and contributed by several individuals, some known and some unknown. Some of these materials originate from D.C. Lyle himself and were returned to McDonogh after years in the hands of alumni or former faculty members, such as correspondence, photographs, and his classroom bell. Many of these materials were created by other people but are about Lyle, such as the issue of *The Week* dedicated to him after his death in 1938, or McDonogh Magazine articles about him. Arthur D. Thompson (Class of 1891) sought materials related to Lyle while in his position as a member of the Alumni Association, going so far as to obtain photographs of Lyle's home and other buildings around Timber Ridge from one of Lyle's relatives.

Many of the materials that were created while Lyle was alive are from his later years, with the bulk of items dating to between 1910 and 1938. Facsimiles of originals are dated as if they are the original.

Series Description

The Duncan Campbell Lyle Collection is made up of five series. **Series 1:** Biographical Information; **Series 2:** Lyle's Personal Belongings; **Series 3:** Correspondence to and from Lyle; **Series 4:** "Ready to Print" files; **Series 5:** Oversized Items.

Series 1: Biographical Information contains sources of information on Lyle's life, such as newspaper articles, various obituaries and remembrances, and photographs and correspondence from Timber Ridge, VA., spanning 1866 to 1959.

Series 2: Lyle's Personal Belongings contain books purchased by Lyle, his stamp collection, his address book from 1927, the handheld bell from his classroom, and other items that are known to have been owned by D. C. Lyle in his lifetime. This series spans three of five total boxes due to the size and shape of some of the objects, and the locations are listed within the series.

Series 3: Correspondence to and from Lyle are letters to Lyle from alumni and friends, as well as letters from Lyle that were donated back to McDonogh by the recipients or their families, that are sorted chronologically. The correspondence with Douglas Beall (Class of 1894) was already put aside in its own folder before processing and has been kept that way.

Series 4: Photographs contains both photos of D.C. Lyle and some of the photos he was sent or kept over the years. The photos of Lyle that were dated are sorted chronologically, while the undated photos are not in any particular order.

Series 5: “Ready to Print” Files are correspondence, photographs, and news clippings that were filed in a book by Lyle for future use in the Alumni News section of The Week that were sent to him mostly between 1920 and 1933. After his death, it was owned by R.H. Brady (Class of 1906) until he sent it back to McDonogh with a note regarding provenance on the brown paper he wrapped it in. See the inventory listing for more information regarding contents and arrangements.

Series 6: Oversized Items contains several copies of the sheet music for the song “Go and Tell Old Man Lyle,” a few large photographs, and an unframed portrait of Charles H. Harding, Class of 1877, all of which were too large to be stored in the other boxes.

Box 1 of 5

Series 1: Biographical Information

- 1-1** Biographical Information on D.C. Lyle, March 1866 – January 1, 1970, n.d.
- 1-2** Celebrations of and for Lyle, April 1913 – July 24, 1937, n.d.
- 1-3** Lyle’s Death and Burial, February 28, 1938– February 14, 1966
- 1-4** Posthumous remembrances of Lyle, April 22, 1938 – Fall 2003
- 1-5** Correspondence regarding obtaining Lyle-related materials for McDonogh, January 27, 1959 – November 23, 1959
- 1-6** Letters and photos from Timber Ridge, VA/Edgewood, Lyle’s hometown and childhood home, exchanged between A.D. Thompson (Class of 1891) and W. Twyman Williams, a relative of Lyle, July 29, 1947 – August 2, 1950
- 1-7** Photos of Timber Ridge/Edgewood, n.d.

Series 2: Lyle’s Personal Belongings

- 1-8** Photo card of Lyle B. Henry, son of M.E. Henry, November 1918
- 1-9** Lyle’s Address to the Alumni Association of McDonogh School, July 4, 1889
- 1-10** Poems transcribed by Lyle, n.d. and a 1904 political cartoon
- 1-11** Postcard and Stamp Collection, 1881 – 1943

Box 2 of 5

- 2-1** Lyle’s Address Book, c. 1927
- 2-2** Letter Cyphers, c. 1933

The other items of this series are in Box 3 due to their storage needs:

Box 3 of 5

- 3-1** Lyle's copy of "Four American Poems Translated Into German" by Charles T. Eben, acquired September 7, 1877
- 3-2** Lyle's Classroom Bell, returned to McDonogh c. Spring 1976
- 3-3** Two identical pins featuring a picture of Lyle, possibly for his 70th birthday in 1917
- 3-4** Lyle's copy of "Academic Algebra" by Webster Wells, acquired August 1888
- 3-5** Lyle's copy of "Laboratory Manual in Biology" by Richard W. Sharpe, acquired March 13, 1912

Series 3: Correspondence to and from Lyle

Box 2 of 5

- 2-3** Lyle's Correspondence, March 27, 1889 – December 12, 1919
- 2-4** Lyle's Correspondence, March 9, 1920 – February 14, 1938; n.d.
- 2-5** Correspondence with Douglas Beall (Class of 1894), October 24, 1905 – November 7, 1910
- 2-6** Postcard and Ink Blotter to/from D.C. Lyle, c. 1909 – 1921

Series 4: Photographs

- 2-7** Photos of Lyle, dated, c. 1898 – 1937
- 2-8** Photos of Lyle, n.d.
- 2-9** Misc. Photos, n.d.

Series 5: "Ready to Print" Files

Box 4 of 5

These items come from a book labelled "Ready to Print." Lyle used to keep items from or about alumni and their families in. He would use these pieces to write alumni updates in The Week. The book had tabs along the side going from "A" to "Z" and items were placed between the pages. The folders are named after the letter that the items were on. Not every letter was used.

After Lyle's death in 1938, the book was in the possession of R. H. Brady, Class of 1906 and Alumni Association officer. He mailed the book back to McDonogh School on April 6, 1953, with a note written on the brown paper he wrapped it in. The paper was discarded after the note was photocopied.

Brady mentions that while Lyle did a little alphabetical sorting, many items were not in alphabetical order, and he left them where they were when he received the book. The items have been put in folders based on where they were found when processed. Lyle sometimes stored smaller photographs or documents inside reused envelopes. Items about the same alum have been put together via sleeves or paperclips where possible.

Inclusive Dates: 1911 – 1953

Bulk Dates: 1920 – 1933

- 4-1 Package Wrapping, April 6, 1953
- 4-2 Front Flyleaf, September 14, 1925
- 4-3 "B" Page, 3/18/1933
- 4-4 "C" Page, 3/1920 – 6/27/1927
- 4-5 "D" Page 8/19/1917 – 6/17/1934
- 4-6 "F" Page 1/18/1922 – 1933
- 4-7 "G" Page 6/8/1916 – 8/19/ 1929
- 4-8 "H" Page 9/24/1911 – 4/16/1932
- 4-9 "J" Page 1/2/1921 – 7/8/1943
- 4-10 "K" Page 7/5/1920 – 7/19/1937
- 4-11 "L" Page 1/29/1920 – 7/30/1922
- 4-12 "M" Page 6/20/1921 – 3/1928
- 4-13 "N" Page 8/3/1921 – 5/1934
- 4-14 "O" Page 11/5/1928
- 4-15 "P" Page 1918 – 9/9/1933
- 4-16 "R" Page 6/1922 – 10/1928
- 4-17 "S" Page 12/1/1921 – 5/1/1933
- 4-18 "T" Page 12/1926 – 12/1929
- 4-19 "W" Page 10/18/1920 – 6/16/1934

Box 5 of 5

Series 6: Oversized Items

- 5-1 Oversized photographs, May 16, 1917 – June 16, 1937
- 5-2 "Go and Tell Old Man Lyle" by Eustace Glascock and William Jones, 1919
- 5-3 Portrait of Charles H. Harding, Class of 1877, n.d.