

July 31, 1951

Incoming ltr  
 Personal ↗

Dunbar, Paul

Dear HML:

Thank you for your fine letter of July 23d. It is good to have news of your goings-on.

You ask if LC has "any mss and papers by or about Paul Laurence Dunbar."

Yes, Sir!

We have a number of scattered letters from Dunbar and his wife in the Booker T. Washington Papers; one concerns his composition of the Tuskegee hymn. There is, in addition, a single letter in the Charles Henry Webb Papers, dated April 30th, 1898; and there is a four-page autobiographical letter (a negative photostat) from Dunbar to Mrs. A. S. Lanahan, dated at the Library of Congress, February 17th, 1898, in the reproductions made from the Charles C. Hart Collection. If you want photostats, please let me know.

As for his employment in L.C., I find the following information on a "personal statistics" card, dated October 6th, 1897: Paul Laurence Dunbar, Roll 22, address 1934 Fourth Street, N. W., assigned to the stacks, annual compensation \$720, was appointed September 30th, 1897, with legal residence in Montgomery County, Ohio. He was then unmarried; born June 27th, 1872, in Dayton, Ohio; he was appointed from the State of New York; and was previously a journalist. He was given indefinite leave without pay November 1, 1898, and resigned January 1, 1899.

Mr. Dunbar was recommended by a prominent lawyer, of Walton, Dobbs' Ferry-on-Hudson, who wrote to the Librarian of Congress, John Russell Young, on July 5th, 1897:

The other day I wrote you just to say that I was glad that you had been appd. Librarian — It did not occur to me that I would ask you for a favor. Yesterday I read a letter from Paul Lawrence [sic] Dunbar, a young colored fellow in whom I take a great interest. Let me tell you about him. His parents were both slaves — freed by the war. This boy, born I think in Ohio, was educated just a little, in the common school. When he was under twenty he published a little volume of verses, under the title of "Majors and Minors" — Some of these poems are wonderful. They show great thought on great subjects. They are intense, subtle, passionate and poetic. He has written verses worthy of the greatest American poet. Some of his songs, or lyrics, are filled with touches of pathos-of joy-or real humor. Dunbar is now in England. He is coming home. He, of course is poor. He is crazy to read — to be in the company of books. Could you give this young fellow a place in the Library? He is about twenty four or five years old — writes a good hand and is a natural gentleman. Can you do this?

Yours always  
/s/ R. G. Ingersoll

I will send you his book.

Then there is a letter to the Honorable John Russell Young, written from New York, September 3rd, 1897:

When I wrote you some time ago, I had intended to come to Washington at once. But you will understand that not lack of interest has kept me away but lack of opportunity, when I say that I have been preparing a novel for the publishers' readers, have been doing work for the Tribune, Sun, Independent and Bookman & Century magazines. I hope to finish next week and to call

upon you with the letter of our common friend, Colonel Ingersoll.

Very Sincerely Yours,  
/s/ Paul Laurence Dunbar  
129 W. 30th St.

Next there is a letter from Paul Laurence Dunbar, 1934 Fourth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C., October 28, 1898, to John Russell Young, Librarian of Congress:

As you know I have been ill for two weeks past, and away from the library. I was there today, and tried to resume my duty, but found myself unable to do so. I know nothing else to do save to ask for a leave to recruit my strength. I like my work, and do not want to resign, but find myself completely broken down both in health and spirits. If it is possible to give me a leave of absence without pay until the first of the year, I should be profoundly grateful for the favor....

P.S. You have not signified whether or not you would like to have a copy of my novel in book form concerning which I asked you in my last note.

To which Mr. Young replied the next day:

I am sorry to hear of your continued illness and hope it presages a speedy recovery. Under the law, I can give you a leave of sixty days. October 29th covers your time. As you desire it, I shall give you a leave without pay until January 1st, 1899, and then restore you to your position. You need have no anxiety about your place — my only wish being that you shall return in the best form. It is very good of you to promise me your novel, for which I thank you in anticipation.

These scraps are all I have come upon in our institutional archives, but if you need more I'll be happy to grub for 'em.

With my very best,

Faithfully yours,

David C. Mearns  
Chief  
Manuscripts Division

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Greensboro, North Carolina

DCM:lt

*Cum*  
HR 213 # 1299