Collection Summary
Title: Washington Irving Chambers Papers
Span Dates: 1871-1943
Bulk Dates: (bulk 1911-1919)
ID No.: MSS50799
Creator: Chambers, Washington Irving, 1856-1934
Extent: 12,000 items ; 48 containers ; 12 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Summary: Naval officer. Correspondence, subject files, logbooks, memoranda, blueprints, photographs, printed matter, and other papers relating primarily to Chambers's service in the navy and with the Greely Relief Expedition to the Arctic and the Nicaragua Canal survey expedition of 1884-1885.

Selected Search Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People
Baldwin, Thomas S.--Correspondence.
Burgess, W. Starling (William Starling), 1878-1947--Correspondence.
Curtiss, Glenn Hammond, 1878-1930--Correspondence.
Elyson, Theodore Gordon, 1885-1928--Correspondence.
Ely, Eugene--Correspondence.
Godard, Louis, 1847-1928--Correspondence.
Knabenshue, Roy, -1960--Correspondence.
Loening, Grover, 1888-1976--Correspondence.
Martin, Glenn L. (Glenn Luther), 1886-1955--Correspondence.
Means, James, 1853-1920--Correspondence.
Richardson, Holden Chester, 1878--Correspondence.
Rodgers, John, 1881-1926--Correspondence.
Towers, John H. (John Henry), 1885-1955--Correspondence.

Organizations
Greely Relief Expedition (1884)
Naval War College (U.S.)
New York Naval Shipyard.
Pensacola (Screw steamer)
Portsmouth (Sloop of war)
United States Naval Torpedo Station (Newport, R.I)
United States. Navy Department.

Subjects
Aeronautics.
Airships.
Balloons.
Canals--Nicaragua.
Flight.
Fortification--Rhode Island.
Helicopters.
Naval aviation--United States.
Navy-yards and naval stations--New York (State)--New York.
Navy-yards and naval stations--Rhode Island--Newport.
Ordnance, Naval.
Parachutes.
Shipbuilding.

Places
Arctic regions--Discovery and exploration.
Nicaragua Canal (Nicaragua)
Nicaragua--Discovery and exploration.

Occupations
Naval officers.

Administrative Information

Provenance
The papers of Washington Irving Chambers, naval officer, were deposited in the Library of Congress by the Naval Historical Foundation from 1954 to 1962 and converted to a gift in 1998.

Processing History
The collection was processed in 1967. The finding aid was revised in 2011.

Additional Guides
In 1967 the Library published Washington Irving Chambers, a Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress.

Copyright Status
Copyright in the unpublished writings of Washington Irving Chambers in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions
The papers of Washington Irving Chambers are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation
Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Washington Irving Chambers Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1856, Apr. 4</td>
<td>Born, Kingston, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Graduated, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md. Duty in Pensacola (Screw steamer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877-1878</td>
<td>Duty in Portsmouth (Sloop of war)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1879-1882  Duty in *Marion*
            Promoted to ensign

1883-1884  Duty in the Bureau of Navigation

1884      Duty in *Thetis* and *Alert*, Greely Relief Expedition to the Arctic

1884-1888 Duty in the Office of Naval Intelligence
            Promoted to lieutenant, junior grade

1888-1889 Duty in the New York Naval Shipyard

1889-1891 Duty in *Petrel*

1891-1892 Duty in *Atlanta*
            Promoted to lieutenant

1892      Married Isabella Reynolds

1892-1893 Duty at Naval War College


1895-1897 Duty in *Minneapolis*

1898-1899 Duty in Newport Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I.
            Promoted to lieutenant commander

1899-1900 Duty in *Texas*

1900-1902 Duty in *Annapolis*

1902      Duty in *Frolic*

1902-1904 Duty in Newport Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I.

1905-1906 Duty in *Nashville*

1906-1907 Duty in *Florida* and *Newark*

1907-1909 Assistant chief, Bureau of Ordnance
            Promoted to captain

1909      Duty in *Louisiana*

1910      Assistant in charge of aviation matters, Navy Department General Board

1910-1911 Arranged aviation test flights from ships

1911-1913 In charge of aviation matters, Bureau of Navigation
1913  Ordered to retirement from navy; consented to remain on active duty at retired pay in Division of Operations Chairman of board to study the needs of an aeronautical organization within the navy
1914  Established the first Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Fla.
1915-1919  In charge of aviation matters, Naval Operations Office
1919  Released from all active duty and retired
1934, Sept. 23  Died enroute to Washington, D.C., from the Pacific Coast

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Washington Irving Chambers (1856-1934) span the years 1871-1943, with the bulk of the material falling between the years 1911 and 1919. The collection consists primarily of correspondence, subject files, and logbooks, supplemented by journals, notebooks, memoranda, reports, designs, blueprints, photographs, printed matter, newspaper clippings, and miscellaneous material. The collection is roughly divided into two parts: pre-1910 material generally concerned with Chambers's naval career and his activities as an officer at sea and on land; and post-1910 material relating to Chambers's interests in the newly emerging field of naval aviation and his role as one of the pioneer naval officers in aviation. Chambers's accomplishments as a pioneer naval officer in aviation activities tend to obscure many of his earlier achievements in the fleet, at the United Naval Torpedo Station, Newport, Rhode Island, in the New York Naval Shipyard, and in the administrative offices of the Navy Department. There is relatively little material concerning Chambers's personal or family life. The collection is organized into six series: Official Correspondence; General Correspondence; Subject File; Aircraft Logbooks; Naval Logbooks, Notebooks, Journals, and Order Books; and Miscellany. Chambers's pre-aviation career, during which he advanced from midshipman to captain, is thoroughly documented. Included are journals, logbooks, and notebooks, several containers each of official and general correspondence, and assorted material. Many of Chambers's early reports, memoranda, and recommendations have been retained, most of them in his own handwriting. After graduation from the United States Naval Academy in 1876, Chambers's career was that of a typical line officer, with alternate tours of duty at sea and ashore. He served afloat as a midshipman from 1876 to 1878 in the screw steamer Pensacola and sloop of war Portsmouth. In the years from 1878 to 1910 his sea service broadened to include duty in just about every type and variety of ship that was then afloat in the United States Navy. Of exceptional interest are the records of his participation in the Greely Relief Expedition to the Arctic in 1884 and his participation in the Nicaraguan Canal Survey Expedition of 1884-1885. Chambers, in his years at sea, served in both the Pacific and the Atlantic squadrons, and his letters, logbooks, reports, recommendations, and other papers generated on board the ships he served, give evidence of his duty as a navigator, shiphandler, and seaman and of the growth of the United States Navy. Alternating with his sea service Chambers's shore duty included tours at the Bureau of Navigation, at the Naval War College, at the Bureau of Ordnance, and at the Torpedo Station in Newport, Rhode Island. He was a member successively of the Navy Department's General Board, Board on Rules for the Construction of Vessels, and Board on Rules for Steamship Inspection, and finally an assistant to the aide for material of the General Board. Letters, reports, memoranda, and printed material, especially Chambers's personal evaluations and recommendations, originating during these tours of duty, demonstrate that he was a capable officer, well experienced, and above all thoroughly versed in the specialties of ordnance, intelligence, construction and repair of ships, and naval armament. Chambers began early the practice of submitting intelligence reports and of making specific recommendations for improvements in guns, mines, torpedoes, and other ordnance. He also suggested new designs or better construction methods for work on naval vessels. In September 1910 Chambers was detached from command of the battleship Louisiana and reported ashore on orders from the secretary of the navy “to keep himself informed on aviation matters.” Thus began his career in naval aviation. Although without official title, Chambers was the first director of Naval Aviation and served as such until several months after the end of World War I. Papers in this collection representing these ten years, the most important in his military career, pertain almost exclusively to the development of a naval air service and of naval aircraft. Within the general topic of naval
aviation, Chambers covered a variety of specific subjects including dirigibles, helicopters, balloons, aviation camps, parachutes, and transatlantic flights.

Chambers was the chief correspondent for the Navy Department in its dealings with airplane manufacturers such as the Wright Company, Glenn Hammond Curtiss, W. Starling Burgess, and other manufacturers. Correspondence concerning would-be inventors and inventions offers insight into the early technology of aviation mechanisms. The collection includes correspondence with such well-known names in the aviation field as Thomas S. Baldwin, Theodore Gordon Ellyson, Eugene Ely, Louis Godard, Roy Knabenshue, Grover Loening, Glenn L. Martin, James Means, Holden Chester Richardson, John Rodgers, and John H. Towers. The training methods of the early aviators, the testing given their aircraft, and the instruction given to fledgling pilots are documented in the General Correspondence and Subject File. The material for the decade from 1910 to 1920 includes correspondence, reports, memoranda, blueprints, designs, printed matter, photographs, and aviation logbooks.

Arrangement of the Papers

The collection is arranged in six series:

- Official Correspondence, 1871-1934
- General Correspondence, 1874-1943
- Subject File, 1884-1917
- Aircraft Logbooks, 1911-1917
- Naval Logbooks, Notebooks, Journals, and Order Books, 1872-1909
- Miscellany, 1884-1932
### Description of Series

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<th>Container</th>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 1-4</td>
<td><strong>Official Correspondence, 1871-1934</strong></td>
<td>Official letters sent and received. Arranged chronologically.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 5-24</td>
<td><strong>General Correspondence, 1874-1943</strong></td>
<td>Letters sent and received, orders, reports, memoranda, designs, and blueprints. Arranged in two files, chronological and subject, with subject material organized alphabetically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 25-36</td>
<td><strong>Subject File, 1884-1917</strong></td>
<td>Memoranda, designs, blueprints, notes, photographs, printed matter, and newspaper clippings. Arranged alphabetically by subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 37-40</td>
<td><strong>Aircraft Logbooks, 1911-1917</strong></td>
<td>Test data, training information, performance charts, reports, and operational data. Arranged alphabetically by name of airplane manufacturing company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 41-43</td>
<td><strong>Naval Logbooks, Notebooks, Journals, and Order Books, 1872-1909</strong></td>
<td>Logbooks, journals, order books and other accounts. Arranged chronologically and identified according to type of volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 44-48</td>
<td><strong>Miscellany, 1884-1932</strong></td>
<td>Photographs, poetry, literary work, newspaper clippings, printed matter, a biographical file, awards, diplomas, drawings, notes, articles, and memoranda. Arranged by type of material.</td>
</tr>
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## Container List

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Container</th>
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</table>
| BOX 1-4   | **Official Correspondence, 1871-1934**  
Offcial letters sent and received.
Arranged chronologically. |
| BOX 1     | 1871-1893 |
| BOX 2     | 1894-1905 |
| BOX 3     | 1906-1910 |
| BOX 4     | 1911-1934, undated |
| BOX 5-24  | **General Correspondence, 1874-1943**  
Letters sent and received, orders, reports, memoranda, designs, and blueprints.
Arranged in two files, chronological and subject, with subject material organized alphabetically. |
| BOX 5     | Chronological  
1874-1893 |
| BOX 6     | 1894-1910 |
| BOX 7     | 1920-1934, 1943, undated |
| BOX 8     | Subject  
“A” miscellaneous  
Adams & Co.  
*Aerial Age*  
Aero Club of America  
Aero Club of Illinois  
Aeromotion Co. of America  
Aeronautical Congress, Turin, Italy  
Aeronautical Exposition, New York, N.Y.  
Aeronautical laboratories |
| BOX 9     | Aeronautical reserves  
Aeronautical Society  
*Aeronautics* magazine  
Aircraft carriers  
Airplanes  
Carburetors  
Engines  
Hangers  
Instruments  
Landing devices |
| BOX 10    | Launching devices  
Navigation  
Paint  
Parts |
Speed indicators
Stabilizers
Starters
Albree, George
American Dirigible Balloon Syndicate

BOX 11
American Duralumin Co.
American Hydroplane Co.
Armstrong, E. B.
Austrian Aircraft Co.
Aviation
Appropriations
Bombing
Camps
Establishment
Organization

BOX 12
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Guantanamo Bay, Cuba
San Diego, Calif.
Catapults
Contests
Nomenclature
Overseas (foreign)

BOX 13
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Canada
France
Germany
Great Britain
Radio developments
Safety
Warfare
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Belgian Military Mission
Benoist (Thomas) Aircraft Co.
Bristol Co.
Buff & Buff Manufacturing Co.
Burgess (W. Starling) Co. & Curtis
(1 folder)

BOX 14
(1 folder)
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Burt, C. P.
Butler, Paul J.
“C” miscellaneous
Collier Flying Boat Co.
Curtiss Aeroplane Co.
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<tr>
<th>Container</th>
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| BOX 15    | Curtiss, Glenn Hammond  
            | “D” miscellaneous  
            | Derby Aerial Car  
            | Dirigibles  
            | Douglas, Donald W.  
            | Doyle, Edward C.  
            | “E” miscellaneous  
            | Ellyson, Theodore Gordon  
            | (8 folders) |
| BOX 16    | Ellyson, Theodore Gordon (photostats)  
            | (5 folders) |
|           | Ely, Eugene  
            | “F” miscellaneous  
            | Farman Co.  
            | Flindt, Charles  
            | Ford, William T.  
            | Franklin Institute  
            | “G” miscellaneous  
            | Gallaudet (Edson) Engineering Co.  
            | Geyer, Charles R.  
            | Godard, Louis  
            | Grant, Randolph S. |
| BOX 17    | Gyro Motor Co.  
            | “H” miscellaneous  
            | Hanscom, Clarence D.  
            | Harkness, Harry  
            | Harriman, J. Emery  
            | Hazard, Gould & Co.  
            | Helicopters  
            | Herbster, V. D.  
            | Hill, W. H.  
            | “I” miscellaneous  
            | Industrial Instrument Co.  
            | Inventors and Inventions  
            | (1 folder) |
| BOX 18    | (1 folder)  
            | “J” miscellaneous  
            | Joplin Monoplane, Windata and Aerograph Co.  
            | “K” miscellaneous  
            | Keuffel & Esser Co. |
| BOX 19    | Knabenshue, Roy  
            | “L” miscellaneous  
            | Langley Aerodynamic Laboratory  
            | Lawson Publishing Co.  
            | Leatheroid Manufacturing Co.  
            | Linthicum, W. D.  
<pre><code>        | Loening, Grover |
</code></pre>
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<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOX 20</td>
<td>“N” miscellaneous National Seamless Boat Co. Naval airplanes Architecture Aviation Appropriations Course instruction Institute License applications (1 folder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 21</td>
<td>(1 folder) Reserves Specifications Navy Department “O” miscellaneous O’Leary, John and Molly Olmsted, Frederic L. Ostheimer Brothers “P” miscellaneous Parachutes Parisano, Michael Pennie, Goldsborough &amp; O’Neill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 23</td>
<td>Skerrett, Robert G. Sloane Aeroplane Co. Sperry Gyroscope Co.</td>
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</table>
Submarines
“T” miscellaneous
Thomas Brothers Aeroplane Co.
Towers, John H.
Transatlantic flights
Transportation orders

BOX 24
Tulsa Motor Co.
“U-V” miscellaneous
Van Wye, G. P.
“W-Z” miscellaneous
Willoughby Aeroplane Co.
Wright Co.
Yates, Robert

BOX 25-36
Subject File, 1884-1917
Memoranda, designs, blueprints, notes, photographs, printed matter, and newspaper clippings.
Arranged alphabetically by subject.

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Aeronautical Society, 1911-1914

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Airplanes, 1910-1917
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Paint

BOX 27
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BOX 28
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Centrifugal Force Convertor, undated
Curtiss Aeroplane Co., 1912-1913
Dirigibles, 1911-1914
Foreign navies, 1887-1910

BOX 29
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Nicaraguan Canal Survey Expedition, 1884-1892

BOX 31
Nicaraguan Canal Survey Expedition
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Steering compasses
Submarines
Torpedo boats
Topographical maps, 1910-1911
Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I., undated
Unitarian sermons of U. G. B. Pierce
  1914-1916
  1932, 1934

BOX 36

United States Navy, 1884-1897
Wright Co., 1913-1914

BOX 37-40  Aircraft Logbooks, 1911-1917

Test data, training information, performance charts, reports, and operational data.
Arranged alphabetically by name of airplane manufacturing company.

BOX 37

Burgess Co.
  Burgess-Dunne Pusher Biplane, 1915-1917
  Burgess Flying Boat D-1, 1913-1914
  Burgess Flying Boat D-2, 1913-1914

Curtiss Co.
  Curtiss Single Pontoon, 1911-1915
  Curtiss Flying Boat C-1, 1912-1914
  Curtiss Hydroplane A-1, 1911-1912
  Curtiss Hydroplane A-1 (printed copy), 1911-1912
  Curtiss Pusher 63A (stricken from navy list), Feb. 1917

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Curtiss Pusher Biplane, 1914-1917
Curtiss Pusher Biplane Fly-boat, 1914-1917
Curtiss Pusher Biplane Single Pontoon AH13, 1915-1917
Curtiss Pusher Biplane Single Pontoon AH15
Curtiss Pusher Biplane Single Pontoon, 1915-1916
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BOX 39

Curtiss Student Aviator A57, 1917
Curtiss Student Aviator A58, 1917
Gallaudet Co., Gallaudet Nacelle Pusher, Mar. 1917
Sturtevant Co., Sturtevant Tractor Biplane Pontoon, 1916-1917

BOX 40

Wright Co.
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  Wright Biplane Twin Pontoon, 1916-1917
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Wright Hydroplane B-2, 1912-1916**  
Wright Navy Built B-3, 1913  
Nine undated logs, AB-1, AB-2, AB-6, AB-7, AH-1, AH-4, AH-5, AH-6, AX-1 |
| **BOX 41-43** | **Naval Logbooks, Notebooks, Journals, and Order Books, 1872-1909**  
Logbooks, journals, order books and other accounts.  
Arranged chronologically and identified according to type of volume. |
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*Annapolis*, 1901  
Order book, *Annapolis*, 1900-1901 |
| **BOX 44-48** | **Miscellany, 1884-1932**  
Photographs, poetry, literary work, newspaper clippings, printed matter, a biographical file,  
awards, diplomas, drawings, notes, articles, and memoranda.  
Arranged by type of material. |
| **BOX 44** | Photographs, 1884-1911 |
| **BOX 45** | Poetry and literary works, mostly undated |
| **BOX 46** | Newspaper clippings, 1911-1917 |
| **BOX 47** | Printed matter, 1911-1917 |
| **BOX 48** | Biographical file (mainly Chambers's retirement), 1912-1932  
Awards and diplomas, 1887-1915  
Drawings, notes, articles, and memoranda, mostly undated |