

Denby Family Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2023

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm2001084834>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms007015>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2007
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Collection Summary

Title: Denby Family Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1850-1911

ID No.: MSS84834

Creator: Denby family

Extent: 2,000 items

Extent: 8 containers

Extent: 3.2 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2001084834>

Summary: Correspondence between members of the Denby family. Includes letters of Charles Denby (1830-1904), a lawyer and diplomat; Charles Denby (1861-1938), a diplomat; and Edwin Denby, a member of the United States Congress and secretary of the navy. Relates to the Civil War, diplomatic life in China, and the Spanish-American War.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Denby family.

Denby, Charles, 1830-1904--Correspondence.

Denby, Charles, 1861-1938--Correspondence.

Denby, Edwin, 1870-1929--Correspondence.

Denby, Graham--Correspondence.

Denby, Harriet--Correspondence.

Denby, Martha Fitch--Correspondence.

Denby, Thomas Garvin--Correspondence.

Denby, Wythe--Correspondence.

Fitch, Graham N. (Graham Newell), 1809-1892--Correspondence.

Fitch, Harriet Satterlee--Correspondence.

Organizations

China. Hai guan zong shui wu si shu.

College of New Jersey (Princeton, N.J.)

Hellmuth Ladies' College (London, Ont.)

United States. Army. Indiana Infantry Regiment, 42nd (1861-1865)

United States. Army. Indiana Infantry Regiment, 80th (1862-1865)

United States. Congress.

United States. Department of State.

United States. Philippine Commission (1899-1900)

United States. War Department.

Yosemite (Cruiser)

Subjects

Customs administration--China.

Diplomatic and consular service, American--China--Beijing.

Diplomatic and consular service, American--China.

Mining engineering--Alaska.

Mining engineering--Arizona.

Mining engineering--Utah.

Practice of law--Indiana--Evansville.

Spanish-American War, 1898.

Universities and colleges--New Jersey--Princeton.
Universities and colleges--Ontario--London.

Places

Alabama--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
China--Commerce.
China--Foreign relations--United States.
Europe--Description and travel.
Evansville (Ind.)--Social life and customs.
Indiana--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
Indiana--History.
Kentucky--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
Logansport (Ind.)--Social life and customs.
Philippines--Description and travel.
Tennessee--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
United States--Foreign relations--China.
Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

Acquisition Information

The papers of the Denby family were given to the Library of Congress by Gilbert Wilkes in 2001 and 2002.

Processing History

The papers of the Denby family were arranged and described by Laura J. Kells in 2002. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings by members of the Denby family is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of the Denby family 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, Denby Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Notes

Charles Denby (1830-1904)

Date	Event
1830, June 16	Born, Mount Joy, Va.
1850	Graduated, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va.
1855	Admitted to the Indiana bar; began practicing law in Evansville, Ind.

1858	Married Martha Fitch
1861	Appointed lieutenant colonel, 42nd Indiana Volunteers
1862	Engaged in battle of Perryville, Ky. Appointed colonel, 80th Indiana Volunteers
1863	Resigned from military
1876	Delegate to Democratic National Convention, St. Louis, Mo.
1884	Delegate to Democratic National Convention, Chicago, Ill.
1885-1898	United States minister to China
1898	Named to United States Commission Appointed by the President to Investigate the Conduct of the War Department in the War with Spain
1899	Appointed to United States Philippine Commission Visited Philippines
1904, Jan. 13	Died, Jamestown, N. Y.
1906	Posthumous publication of <i>China and Her People</i> (Boston: L. C. Page and Co. 2 vols.)

Charles Denby (1861-1938)

Date	Event
1861, Nov. 14	Born, Evansville, Ind.
1882	Graduated, College of New Jersey, Princeton, N. J. (now Princeton University)
1885-1893	Second secretary, United States legation, Peking (now known as Beijing), China
1893-1897	First secretary, United States legation, Peking (now known as Beijing), China
1895	Married Martha Dalzell Orr
1897-1900	In business with Arnhold, Karberg and Co., Tientsin (now known as Tianjin), China
1900	Appointed secretary general of provisional government, Tientsin (now known as Tianjin), China
1902-1905	Foreign advisor to viceroy of Chilhi Province (now known as Zhili Province), China
1905-1907	Chief clerk, State Department, Washington, D. C.
1907-1909	United States consul general, Shanghai, China
1909-1915	United States consul general, Vienna, Austria
1915-1917	Vice president, Hupp Motor Car Corp., Detroit, Mich.
1917	Director, Bureau of Foreign Agents, War Trade Board, Washington, D. C.
1918	Special representative, State Department, Japan and China
1922-1923	Special representative, United States Shipping Board, Japan and China
1938, Feb. 14	Died, Washington, D. C.

Edwin Denby

Date	Event
1870, Feb. 18	Born, Evansville, Ind.
1887-1894	Served in Chinese Maritime Customs Service
1896	Received law degree, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. Started law practice, Detroit, Mich.
1898	Gunner's mate, <i>Yosemite</i> (auxiliary cruiser)
1903	Elected to Michigan House of Representatives
1905-1911	Republican congressman, Michigan First District, United States House of Representatives
1911	Married Marion Bartlett Thurber
1917	Enlisted in United States Marine Corps.
1920-1921	Chief probation officer, Recorder's Court, City of Detroit, Mich., and Circuit Court of Wayne County, Mich.
1921-1924	Secretary of the navy; resigned following Teapot Dome affair
1929	Died, Detroit, Mich.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of the Denby family span the years 1850-1911 and consist primarily of correspondence and related matter exchanged among family members. The bulk of the letters are between Charles Denby (1830-1904), a lawyer and minister to China, his wife Martha Fitch Denby ("Mattie"), and their children Graham, Charles, Harriet ("Hattie" and "Ethel"), Wythe, Edwin ("Ned"), and Thomas Garvin ("Garvin"). Charles Denby (1861-1938) was also a diplomat in China, and Edwin Denby served as a member of the United States Congress and as secretary of the navy. There are also letters from Martha's mother, Harriet Satterlee Fitch ("Moo") and her father Graham Newell Fitch, a doctor who served as United States senator from Indiana.

The major portion of the correspondence from the 1850s is between Charles Denby and Martha Fitch during their two-year engagement. The letters document their long-distance courtship. Charles was a young lawyer in Evansville, Indiana, struggling to make enough money to marry Martha. She was from Logansport, Indiana, and spent part of the time in Washington, D.C., while her father served in Congress.

During the Civil War Charles Denby wrote letters from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama while serving as lieutenant colonel in the Forty-Second Indiana Volunteers. Those from October 1862 describe the battle of Perryville, Kentucky, in which Denby was slightly injured and his horse killed. In late 1862, Denby was appointed colonel of the Eightieth Indiana Volunteers headquartered in Columbia, Kentucky. In addition to describing camp life and home life during this period, correspondence between Charles and Martha Denby indicates that she traveled to visit him while he was in camp in Huntsville, Alabama, as well as at Columbia. An undated account relates to Martha's stay in the deserted mansion of Clement C. Clay in Huntsville, Alabama.

Correspondence from the mid 1860s through the 1870s records births, deaths, illnesses, and other activities of the growing Denby family, local and national events, and Charles Denby's work as a lawyer. There are numerous letters from the Denbys' son Charles (1861-1938) describing his life at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) and from their daughter Harriet, who attended Hellmuth Ladies' College in London, Ontario, Canada.

The Denby family resided in China from 1885 until 1905, starting when the elder Charles Denby was appointed minister to China. He held this post for thirteen years during which time some of the children returned to the United States. Martha Denby made the long trip between the United States and China several times to tend to family members. Son Charles (1861-1938) spent the longest time in China, working in diplomatic service and in business. Edwin Denby served in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service for seven years and wrote letters from Macao, where he was stationed for part of this period. Letters from China describe the official, social, and domestic lives of the diplomatic community in Peking. The Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Rebellion are discussed in the correspondence. Lengthy letters between family members separated by great distances document efforts to keep each other informed of events in their lives and indicate the emotional and financial problems caused by the slowness and unreliability of the mail.

The Spanish-American War is also treated in the correspondence. Son Edwin and son-in-law Gilbert Wilkes served aboard the *Yosemite* (auxiliary cruiser) in 1898. Charles Denby, Sr., spent time in Washington, D. C., as a member of a commission appointed by the president to investigate the conduct of the War Department during the war with Spain. In 1899 he traveled to the Philippines as a member of the United States Philippine Commission. Martha Denby and son Thomas Garvin accompanied him on that trip. A letter from Martha Denby contains a journal describing their activities and the people she met.

Correspondence beginning in the 1890s documents the adult lives of the Denby children. Wythe Denby became a mining engineer in Utah, Arizona, and Alaska. In letters to his mother in 1904 and 1905, Edwin Denby gave accounts of his election to Congress and his early days in Washington. Charles Denby (1861-1938) wrote in 1905 and 1906 describing his work in the State Department. The last letters were written by Edwin Denby to his sister during his honeymoon trip in Europe. The bulk of the correspondence ends with the death of the parents, and subsequent periods of the careers of Edwin Denby and the younger Charles Denby are not documented.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged chronologically; undated material arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	1850-1857 (8 folders)
BOX 1	1858
BOX 1	Jan.-June (5 folders)
BOX 2	July-Nov. (3 folders)
BOX 2	1859-1865 (13 folders)
BOX 3	1866-1879 (17 folders)
BOX 4	1880-1888 (14 folders)
BOX 5	1889-1893 (13 folders)
BOX 6	1894-1896 (10 folders)
BOX 6	1897
BOX 6	Jan.-Oct. (3 folders)
BOX 7	Nov.-Dec.
BOX 7	1898-1904 (11 folders)
BOX 8	1905-1911 (4 folders)
BOX 8	Undated
BOX 8	Denby, Charles (1830-1904)
BOX 8	Denby, Charles (1861-1938)
BOX 8	Denby, Charles (1861-1938)
BOX 8	Denby, Martha Fitch ("Mattie") (2 folders)
BOX 8	Denby, Thomas Garvin ("Garvin")
BOX 8	Denby, Wythe
BOX 8	Fitch, Harriet Satterlee ("Moo") (3 folders)
BOX 8	Miscellaneous
BOX 8	Wilkes, Harriet Ethel Denby ("Hattie," "Ethel")