

Robert R. Williams Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2008

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82047241>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms008013>

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Revised by Patrick Kerwin

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Collection Summary

Title: Robert R. Williams Papers

Span Dates: 1911-1981

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1934-1961)

ID No.: MSS47241

Creator: Williams, Robert R., 1886-1965

Extent: 11,000 items

Extent: 35 containers

Extent: 15.6 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English and German

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm82047241>

Summary: Chemist, nutritionist, and developer of vitamin B1. Correspondence, diaries, affidavits, reports, subject files, laboratory notebooks, speeches and writings, printed matter, and other papers relating to Williams's research in nutritional chemistry.

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

Buchman, Edwin R.--Correspondence.

Cline, Joseph K.--Correspondence.

Funk, Casimir, 1884-1967--Correspondence.

Kik, M. C. (Marinus Cornelis), 1896-1975--Correspondence.

Lease, E. J. (Elmer John), 1908- --Correspondence.

Merriam, John C. (John Campbell), 1869-1945--Correspondence.

Poillon, Howard Andrews, 1879-1954--Correspondence.

Waterman, Robert E. (Robert Edward), 1899- --Correspondence.

Williams, Robert R., 1886-1965.

Organizations

Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Interessengemeinschaft Farbenindustrie Aktiengesellschaft.

Merck & Co.

Research Corporation.

Williams-Waterman Fund.

Subjects

Beri-beri.

Diet--Asia.

Diet--Southern States.

Enriched foods.

Flour.

Food--Composition.

Nutrition.

Nutritionally induced diseases.

Patents.

Rice.

Vitamin B in human nutrition.

Vitamin B1.

Places

Asia--Description and travel.
Southern States--Description and travel.

Occupations

Chemists.
Nutritionists.

Provenance

The papers of Robert R. Williams, chemist, nutritionist, and developer of vitamin B1, were given to the Library of Congress in 1979 and 1983 by the Research Corporation of New York, N.Y.

Processing History

The papers of Robert R. Williams were arranged and described in 1981. The collection was expanded and revised in 1985 and 1999. The finding aid was revised in 2008. A description of the Williams Papers appears in *Library of Congress Acquisitions: Manuscript Division, 1979*, pp. 28-30.

Transfers

Items have been transferred from the Manuscript Division to other custodial divisions of the Library. Photographs and glass spectrographic plates have been transferred to the Prints and Photograph Division. Motion picture films have been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division. All transfers are identified in these divisions as part of the Robert R. Williams Papers.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Robert R. Williams 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, Robert R. Williams Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1886, Feb. 16	Born near Nellore, India
1907	B.S., University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.
1908	M.S., University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.
1909-1915	Chemist, Bureau of Science, Interior Department, Manila, Philippines
1912	Married, Augusta C. Parrish
1915-1918	Chemist, Bureau of Chemistry, Agriculture Department, Washington, D.C.

1919-1924	Chemist, Western Electric Co.
1925-1945	Chemical director, Bell Telephone Laboratories, New York, N.Y.
1933	Isolated crystalline form of vitamin B1
1935	Completed synthesis of vitamin B1 Established the Williams-Waterman Fund for the Combat of Dietary Diseases
1945-1950	Director of grants, Research Corp., New York, N.Y.
1950-1956	Chairman of the Williams-Waterman Fund
1965, Oct. 2	Died, Summit, N.J.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Robert Ramapatnam Williams (1886-1965) span the years 1911-1981 with the bulk of the material dating from 1934-1961. The papers are in English and German. The collection is arranged into seven series: [Diaries](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Special Correspondence](#), [Subject File](#), [Speech and Article File](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Addition](#).

Williams's search for a cure for beriberi, which began when he was a chemist with the Bureau of Science in the Philippines, ultimately led to his discovery of thiamin, the first of the B vitamins, and to his later synthesis of the vitamin. Following synthesis, the manufacture of vitamin B1 in quantity at a reasonable price made it possible to add the vitamin to foodstuffs such as bread and cereal grains.

Among the most informative items in the papers are Williams's [diaries](#) for the years 1938-1953 in which he described in detail his visits to flour mills in the southern United States during the late 1930s and discussions with millers and heads of baking firms to persuade them to enrich their flours with vitamin B1. The [diaries](#) also describe Williams's trip to Europe in 1930 in connection with European production of Vitamin B1 and a patent dispute with the I.G. Farben laboratories, his visit to China in 1946 where he advocated the enrichment of rice, and tour of India, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, and the Philippine Islands in 1950-1951.

The small group of letters in the [General Correspondence](#) series relates mainly to speaking engagements and the publication of Williams's speeches and articles.

Within the [Special Correspondence](#) series are letters exchanged with various corporations, such as the Carnegie Institution, which awarded Williams received grants over the years 1927-1934 for the purchase of scientific equipment, research animals, and supplies. There is also correspondence with Merck and Company for the years 1934-1958. In 1934, before the synthesis of thiamin had been perfected, Merck and Company had provided Williams help in his efforts to extract the vitamin from rice polishings. Following synthesis of the vitamin in 1935, Merck received the first license for commercial production of Vitamin B1.

There is [correspondence](#) (1935-1962) with Research Corporation of New York City, a science-oriented philanthropic foundation which played a particularly important role in Williams's career. In an agreement with Williams and five of his associates, the corporation assigned twenty-five percent of all royalties derived from sales of vitamin B1 to the six scientists and provided that the remaining seventy-five percent be used to support the corporation's Combat of Dietary Diseases. Copies of the corporation's agreement as well as the fund's project reports for the years 1940-1958 are located in the [Subject File](#).

The [Subject File](#), which comprises the bulk of the papers, also includes laboratory notebooks for the period 1932-1936 which document the search for thiamin (B1) and, following its discovery, record the development of vitamin B1, which made possible the economical commercial production of the vitamin. There are also extensive files dealing with patents, particularly the case of *Williams v Andersag* of the I.G. Farben corporation in Germany.

When rapid expansion of commercial production of vitamin B1 reduced the price of the vitamin from ten dollars to a few cents a gram, Williams commenced a campaign, which he pursued for the remainder of his life, for the "enrichment" of bread and white flour with thiamin and other vitamins and minerals. The [Speech and Article File](#) for the years 1913-1964 contains many of the lectures and articles prepared for this effort.

A group of [miscellaneous papers](#) includes appointment books (1947-1956), biographical information, passports, certificates, writings by persons other than Williams, and printed matter.

Among Williams's correspondents are Edwin R. Buchman, Joseph K. Cline, Casimir Funk, M. C. Kik, E. J. Lease, John C. Merriam of the Carnegie Institution, Howard A. Poillon of the Research Corporation, and Williams's principal coworker, Robert E. Waterman.

An addition to the Williams Papers spans the years 1935-1981 and consists of correspondence, affidavits, reports, printed matter, and other material. Of particular interest are the affidavits and other papers relating to the discovery of vitamin B1 which were prepared for various patent cases. The evidence gathered for the cases includes correspondence, reports, laboratory notes, and other material.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in seven series:

- Diaries, 1938-1953
- General Correspondence, 1935-1965
- Special Correspondence, 1927-1962
- Subject File, 1932-1961
- Speech and Article File, 1913-1964
- Miscellany, 1911-1975
- Addition, 1935-1981

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1	<u>Diaries, 1938-1953</u> Diaries kept by Williams. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 2	<u>General Correspondence, 1935-1965</u> Correspondence relating mainly to Williams's speaking engagements and writings. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 3-6	<u>Special Correspondence, 1927-1962</u> Mainly letters to and from various corporations concerning Vitamin B1. Arranged alphabetically by name of corporation or individual and chronologically therein.
BOX 6-23	<u>Subject File, 1932-1961</u> Correspondence, laboratory notebooks, patents, royalty statements, and other papers relating to the production and distribution of vitamin B1. Arranged alphabetically by subject and therein chronologically.
BOX 24-27	<u>Speech and Article File, 1913-1964</u> Speeches and articles by Williams. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 28-30	<u>Miscellany, 1911-1975</u> Appointment books, biographical information, passports, certificates, permits, writings by persons other than Williams, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 31-35	<u>Addition, 1935-1981</u> Reports, affidavits, correspondence, reports, a map, printed matter, including reprints of Williams's articles, and other material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	Diaries, 1938-1953 Diaries kept by Williams. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1	1938-1953 (6 folders)
BOX 2	General Correspondence, 1935-1965 Correspondence relating mainly to Williams's speaking engagements and writings. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 2	1935-1965 (6 folders)
BOX 3-6	Special Correspondence, 1927-1962 Mainly letters to and from various corporations concerning Vitamin B1. Arranged alphabetically by name of corporation or individual and chronologically therein.
BOX 3	Carnegie Institution
BOX 3	Charles Pfizer and Co.
BOX 3	Merck and Co.
BOX 3	1934, Apr.-1940, Jan. (4 folders)
BOX 4	1940, Feb.-1958, Sept. (2 folders)
BOX 4	Research Corp.
BOX 4	1935-1937 (4 folders)
BOX 5	1938-1956 (6 folders)
BOX 6	1957-1962
BOX 6	Waterman, Robert E.
BOX 6	Winthrop Chemical Co.
BOX 6-23	Subject File, 1932-1961 Correspondence, laboratory notebooks, patents, royalty statements, and other papers relating to the production and distribution of vitamin B1. Arranged alphabetically by subject and therein chronologically.
BOX 6	Aceto propane, halogenated derivative (5 folders)
BOX 6	Aceto propanol, preparation of halogen derivatives
BOX 6	Aceto propyl ether production

Subject File, 1932-1961

Container	Contents
BOX 7	Amino acids (2 folders)
BOX 7	Antineuritic compounds (4 folders)
BOX 8	Beriberi
BOX 8	Enriched foodstuffs (4 folders)
BOX 8	Enriched foodstuffs, vitamin B1, 1936-1941 (2 folders)
BOX 9	Organic compounds, halogenated
BOX 9	Pyrimidine compounds (5 folders)
BOX 9	Research Corp.
BOX 9	Rice enrichment
BOX 9	Correspondence
BOX 9	1941, May-1942, Dec.
BOX 10	1943, Jan.-1945, Apr. (5 folders)
BOX 11	1945, May-1961, May
BOX 11	Related papers
BOX 11	Thiazole compounds
BOX 11	Tours
BOX 11	Europe and Egypt
BOX 11	Latin America
BOX 11	Vedder, Edward B.
BOX 12	Vitamin B1
BOX 12	Correspondence
BOX 12	1934, Sept.-1938, Mar. (7 folders)
BOX 13	1938, Apr.-1942, Mar. (7 folders)
BOX 14	1942, Apr.-1961, Aug.
BOX 14	Record of correspondence
BOX 14	1937-1939
BOX 15	1939-1943
BOX 15	Interference, Williams v. Andersag
BOX 15	Laboratory notebooks
BOX 15	1932-1936
BOX 16	1934-1936 (4 folders)
BOX 17	1935-1936 (3 folders)
BOX 17	Licenses, German
BOX 18	Litigation (4 folders)
BOX 19	(2 folders)
BOX 19	Patent petitions

Subject File, 1932-1961

Container	Contents
BOX 19	Patents
BOX 19	Germany
BOX 19	India and Pakistan
BOX 19	Japan
BOX 19	United States
BOX 19	Royalties
BOX 19	1937-1942 (2 folders)
BOX 20	1943-1954 (12 folders)
BOX 21	1955-1961 (4 folders)
BOX 21	Sale of
BOX 21	Wuest's B1 synthesis
BOX 21	Related papers
BOX 21	Williams-Waterman agreement with Research Corp. (2 folders)
BOX 21	Williams-Waterman Fund
BOX 21	Project reports
BOX 21	1940
BOX 22	1941-1954 (3 folders)
BOX 23	1955-1958 (2 folders)
BOX 23	Publication, "Appraisal of Nutrition in Haiti" (2 folders)
BOX 23	Study project
BOX 23	<i>Williams-Waterman Fund for the Combat of Dietary Diseases</i> , correspondence and related papers (2 folders)
BOX 24-27	Speech and Article File, 1913-1964 Speeches and articles by Williams. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 24	1913-1943 (6 folders)
BOX 25	1944-1949 (6 folders)
BOX 26	1950-1954 (6 folders)
BOX 27	1955-1964, undated (5 folders)
BOX 28-30	Miscellany, 1911-1975 Appointment books, biographical information, passports, certificates, permits, writings by persons other than Williams, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Miscellany, 1911-1975

Container

Contents

BOX 28	Appointment books
BOX 28	1947-1954 (2 folders)
BOX 28	1955-1956
BOX 28	Biographical information
BOX 28	Passports, certificates, and permits
BOX 28	Writings by others
BOX 28	Printed matter (2 folders)
BOX 29-30	(10 folders)
BOX 31-35	Addition, 1935-1981 Reports, affidavits, correspondence, reports, a map, printed matter, including reprints of Williams's articles, and other material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 31	Affidavits
BOX 31	Cline, Joseph K., 1938
BOX 31	Finkelstein, Jacob, 1938
BOX 31	General, 1935-1936
BOX 31	Ruehle, A. E., 1938
BOX 31	Schnerring, Albert, 1938
BOX 31	Waterman, Robert E., 1938
BOX 31	Williams, Robert R., 1939 (2 folders)
BOX 31	Correspondence relating to photographs, 1952-1981
BOX 32	Evidence relating to the discovery of vitamin B1, 1935-1936, undated (2 folders)
BOX 32	Map of Manila Bay, Philippines, undated
BOX 32	Reports
BOX 32	Microanalyses on Vitamin B1, 1935-1937
BOX 32	Pharmacological, 1936-1937
BOX 32	Printed matter
BOX 32	<i>Appraisal of Human Diets by Animal Experiment</i> , 1947
BOX 32	General, 1952, undated
BOX 32	Reprints of articles
BOX 32	"Reprints of Robert R. Williams," 1912-1932
BOX 33	Publications
BOX 33	1911-1944 (2 vols.)
BOX 34	1945-1958
BOX 34	"Reprints of Papers Published from the Williams Research Building," 1966-1969 (1 vol.)
BOX 35	(1 vol.)
BOX 35	1969-1971