

**John W. Colbert 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/mm81016345>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms008076>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2008  
Revised 2023 March

## Collection Summary

**Title:** John W. Colbert Papers

**Inclusive Dates:** 1895-1966

**Bulk Dates:** 1903-1944

**ID No.:** MSS16345

**Creator:** Colbert, John W. (John William), 1880-1965

**Extent:** 400 items

**Extent:** 3 containers plus 1 oversize

**Extent:** 1.9 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

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

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm81016345>

**Summary:** Pathologist and physician. Correspondence, diaries, speeches and lectures, articles, research materials, and artwork pertaining to Colbert's experiences researching tropical diseases, providing medical care to the French and American armies during World War I, accompanying the American Expeditionary Forces to Russia, working as a physician in China, founding the Woman's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America, and serving as a U.S. Army officer during World War II.

## 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

Colbert, John W. (John William), 1880-1965.

### Organizations

France. Armée--Medical personnel.

United States. Army--Medical personnel.

United States. Army--Officers.

United States. Army. American Expeditionary Forces.

Woman's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America.

### Subjects

Earthquakes--Japan--Yokohama-shi.

Fires--California--San Francisco.

Fires--Japan--Yokohama-shi.

Medical care--Afghanistan.

Nursing--Study and teaching--Puerto Rico.

Physicians, Foreign--China.

San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, Calif., 1906.

Tropical medicine--Panama.

Tropical medicine--Puerto Rico.

World War, 1914-1918--Medical care--Belgium.

World War, 1914-1918--Medical care--France.

World War, 1914-1918--Medical care--Turkey.

World War, 1939-1945--Alaska.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, Female.

World War, 1939-1945--South Pacific.

World War, 1939-1945--Women.

### Places

China--Politics and government--1912-1949.

China--Social conditions.

Gallipoli Peninsula (Turkey)--History.  
Soviet Union--History--Allied intervention, 1918-1920.  
Tianjin (China)--History.

#### **Titles**

*John William Colbert papers*

#### **Occupations**

Pathologists.  
Physicians.

## **Acquisition Information**

The papers of John W. Colbert, pathologist and physician, were given to the Library of Congress by his daughter, Helen G. Yates, in 1978.

## **Processing History**

The papers of John W. Colbert were arranged and described by Bradley E. Gernand in 1992. The register was revised in 2008. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

## **Transfers**

Photographs have been transferred to the Prints and Photograph Division where they are identified as part of the John W. Colbert Papers.

## **Copyright Status**

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

## **Access and Restrictions**

The papers of John W. Colbert 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, John W. Colbert Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## **Biographical Note**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
1880, Jun. 9	Born, Fairfield, Mo.
1898-1899	Student, Maryville College, Maryville, Tenn.
1899	Student, Mackenzie College, São Paulo, Brazil
1903	Graduate, Marion-Sims-Beaumont College of Medicine, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo.

1904	Resident physician, Maplewood Sanatorium, Jacksonville, Ill. Medical intern, Bellevue Hospital, New York, N.Y. Emergency medical service in New York, N.Y., following the sinking of the <i>General Slocum</i> (steamboat)
1904-1905	Medical superintendent of hospital and tropical pathologist, Puerto Rico
1906	Emergency medical service in San Francisco, Calif., following earthquake and fire
circa 1906	Tropical pathologist in Panama and in the Canal Zone
1906-1913	Chief surgeon, Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway, Los Angeles, Calif., and Albuquerque, N. Mex.
1913-1914	Medical superintendent, United Fruit Co., Colombia
1914-1917	Surgeon and physician for the French Army in Europe during World War I
circa 1915	Married Fritzi Cutts (divorced circa 1944)
1916	Recreational travel around the world with wife
1917-1919	Surgeon and physician for the United States Army in Europe during and following World War I
1918	Wounded by phosgene gas in the Battle of the Argonne, Argonne, France
1919	Wounded in ambulance accident, La Ferté-Bernard, France
1920-1937	Medical practice in Tientsin, China
1923	Led first medical relief expedition to Yokohama-shi, Japan, following earthquake and fire; directed relief program of the United States Navy's Asiatic Fleet
1938	Returned to United States Awarded Military Order of the Purple Heart
1940	Founded the Woman's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America
1941-1945	United States Army officer in South Pacific and Alaska during World War II
1945-1946	Director, Marin Medical Center, Marin, Calif.
1946-1951	Physician and surgeon, Morrison-Knudsen Construction Co., Afghanistan
1947	Married Helen Grace Davis in Karachi, India (now Pakistan)
1953-1954	Physician, Owens-Corning Glass Co., Los Angeles, Calif.
1954-1961	Physician, Coast Federal Savings and Loan Association, Los Angeles, Calif.
1961	Retired
1965, Oct.	Died, New Mexico

## Scope and Content Note

The papers of John William Colbert (1880-1965), tropical pathologist and physician, span the years 1895-1966, with the bulk of the material dating from 1903 to 1944. The papers include articles, artwork, correspondence, diaries, research materials, and speeches and lectures and are organized into the following series: [Correspondence](#), [Writings](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Oversize](#).

Known to friends and family as "Doc," Colbert led a distinguished life and career in various world locales. He contributed substantially to research on tropical diseases; trained the first group of nurses in Puerto Rico; assisted in relief efforts following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and firestorm; accompanied American Expeditionary Forces to Russia in 1918 in support of that country's short-lived republican regime; led the first international relief expedition to reach Yokohama-shi, Japan, following the disastrous earthquake and fire of 1923; lived in China during the severe political and social disorder of the 1920s and 1930s; and pioneered modern medical techniques in Afghanistan following World War II.

Colbert's papers document his experiences in World War I, in China during the interwar years, and in World War II. Serving dual commissions in the French and American armies during the First World War, Colbert was one of few Americans to participate in the conflict from beginning to end. He witnessed battles in France, Belgium, and the Dardanelles. After the war, Colbert began a medical practice in Tientsin (now Tianjin), China, where many foreign nationals lived and where he had connections through his first wife, Fritzi Cutts, an Englishwoman born in China. His papers record the debilitating social and political disorder in that country and the activities of American and European nationals living in Tientsin. Prior

to World War II, Colbert founded and led the Woman's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America (WADCA), a forerunner of later government efforts to involve women in wartime activities.

## Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in four series:

- [Correspondence, 1903-1966](#)
- [Writings, 1895-1964](#)
- [Miscellany, 1903-1965](#)
- [Oversize, 1903-1941](#)

## Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1	<p><b><u>Correspondence, 1903-1966</u></b></p> <p>Letters to and from Colbert and his wives, Fritzi Cutts and Helen Grace Davis. Arranged chronologically by year, month, and day.</p>
BOX 1-3	<p><b><u>Writings, 1895-1964</u></b></p> <p>Diaries, manuscripts of articles and short stories, printed matter, research materials, and speeches and lectures. Organized alphabetically by type of material and therein by topic or subject.</p>
BOX 3	<p><b><u>Miscellany, 1903-1965</u></b></p> <p>Cloth headband worn by relief officials in Yokohama-shi, Japan, in 1923, charcoal and pen-and-ink drawings and sketches by Colbert, and licenses, certificates, and membership cards. Arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX OV 1	<p><b><u>Oversize, 1903-1941</u></b></p> <p>Certificates, licenses, and membership cards. Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which the items were removed.</p>

# Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	<b>Correspondence, 1903-1966</b> Letters to and from Colbert and his wives, Fritzi Cutts and Helen Grace Davis. Arranged chronologically by year, month, and day.
BOX 1	1903-1966, undated
BOX 1-3	<b>Writings, 1895-1964</b> Diaries, manuscripts of articles and short stories, printed matter, research materials, and speeches and lectures. Organized alphabetically by type of material and therein by topic or subject.
BOX 1	Diaries, 1917-1922, 1946
BOX 1	Manuscripts and drafts
BOX 1	Afghanistan, undated
BOX 1	Brazil, undated
BOX 2	China, undated
BOX 2	Dominican Republic, undated
BOX 2	Japanese earthquake of 1923, 1963
BOX 2	Japanese culture and the origin of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, 1940, 1962
BOX 2	Mexico, undated
BOX 2	Miscellaneous, 1940-1964, undated
BOX 2	Sinking of the <i>General Slocum</i> in East River, New York, N.Y., circa 1960
BOX 2	Surgery
BOX 2	Conservative method, circa 1960
BOX 2	World War I, undated
BOX 2	Tennis in Tientsin, China, undated
BOX 2	Woman's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America (WADCA), undated
BOX 2	Printed materials, 1895, 1908-1938 (2 folders)
BOX 2	Research materials
BOX 2	Japanese earthquake of 1923, 1923-1946
BOX 3	Woman's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America, 1940-1942
BOX 3	Speeches and lectures
BOX 3	Scrapbook (includes some published writings), 1910-1935
BOX 3	Typescripts and handwritten manuscripts, 1898-1944
BOX 3	<b>Miscellany, 1903-1965</b> Cloth headband worn by relief officials in Yokohama-shi, Japan, in 1923, charcoal and pen-and-ink drawings and sketches by Colbert, and licenses, certificates, and membership cards. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 3	Artifact, cloth headband with Chinese and English characters reading, "American Red Cross--Shanghai Unit," worn during relief efforts following the Japanese earthquake of 1923, 1923

## Miscellany, 1903-1965

<b>Container</b>	<b>Contents</b>
BOX 3	Artwork, charcoal and pen-and-ink drawings, 1934-1946, undated
BOX 3	Certificates, licenses, and membership cards, 1915-1965, undated <i>See Oversize</i>
BOX OV 1	<b>Oversize, 1903-1941</b> Certificates, licenses, and membership cards. Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Miscellany
BOX OV 1	Certificates, licenses, and membership cards, 1903-1941, undated (Container 3)