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://lccn.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

Organizations
France. Armée--Medical personnel.
United States. Army--Medical personnel.
United States. Army--Officers.
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--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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880, Jun. 9</td>
<td>Born, Fairfield, Mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898-1899</td>
<td>Student, Maryville College, Maryville, Tenn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Student, Mackenzie College, São Paulo, Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Graduate, Marion-Sims-Beaumont College of Medicine, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 General Slocum
       (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)
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

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<th>Description</th>
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<td><strong>BOX 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Correspondence, 1903-1966</strong></td>
<td>Letters to and from Colbert and his wives, Fritzi Cutts and Helen Grace Davis. Arranged chronologically by year, month, and day.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BOX 1-3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Writings, 1895-1964</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOX 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Miscellany, 1903-1965</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOX OV 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Oversize, 1903-1941</strong></td>
<td>Certificates, licenses, and membership cards. Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which the items were removed.</td>
</tr>
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### Container List

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<tr>
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<td>1903-1966, undated</td>
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<td>Diaries, 1917-1922, 1946</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Japanese earthquake of 1923, 1963</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Japanese culture and the origin of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, 1940, 1962</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Mexico, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Miscellaneous, 1940-1964, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Sinking of the <em>General Slocum</em> in East River, New York, N.Y., circa 1960</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Surgery</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Conservative method, circa 1960</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>World War I, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Tennis in Tientsin, China, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Woman's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America (WADCA), undated</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Printed materials, 1895, 1908-1938&lt;br&gt;(2 folders)</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Research materials</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Japanese earthquake of 1923, 1923-1946</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Woman's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America, 1940-1942</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Speeches and lectures</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Scrapbook (includes some published writings), 1910-1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Typescripts and handwritten manuscripts, 1898-1944</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Artifact, cloth headband with Chinese and English characters reading, &quot;American Red Cross--Shanghai Unit,&quot; worn during relief efforts following the Japanese earthquake of 1923, 1923</td>
</tr>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Artwork, charcoal and pen-and-ink drawings, 1934-1946, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>Certificates, licenses, and membership cards, 1915-1965, undated See Oversize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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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) |