

William Shepherd Benson Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2011

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm79012443>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc/mss/eadmss.ms010289>

Prepared by Mary Wolfskill

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2011

Collection Summary

Title: William Shepherd Benson Papers

Span Dates: circa 1791-1952

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1915-1928)

ID No.: MSS12443

Creator: Benson, William Shepherd, 1855-1932

Extent: 17,000 items

Extent: 51 containers plus 6 oversize

Extent: 26.3 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm79012443>

Summary: Naval officer and public official. Correspondence, memoranda, dispatches, speeches, reports, maps, naval appointments, family papers, photographs, and printed materials relating primarily to Benson's naval career, including service as chief of naval operations during World War I.

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

Adams, Charles Francis, 1835-1915--Correspondence.
Andrews, Philip, 1866-1945--Correspondence.
Baker, Newton Diehl, 1871-1937--Correspondence.
Baruch, Bernard M. (Bernard Mannes), 1870-1965--Correspondence.
Belknap, Reginald Rowan, 1871-1959--Correspondence.
Benson, William Shepherd, 1855-1932.
Bliss, Tasker Howard, 1853-1930--Correspondence.
Browning, Montague C.--Correspondence.
Bullard, William Hannum Grubb, 1866-1927--Correspondence.
Caperton, William Banks, 1855-1941--Correspondence.
Curley, Michael Joseph, 1879-1947--Correspondence.
Daniels, Josephus, 1862-1948--Correspondence.
Davis, Norman H. (Norman Hezekiah), 1878-1944--Correspondence.
Fletcher, Duncan Upshaw, 1859-1936--Correspondence.
Gibbons, James, 1834-1921--Correspondence.
Goff, Guy Despard, 1867-1933--Correspondence.
Grew, Joseph C. (Joseph Clark), 1880-1965--Correspondence.
Hoover, Herbert, 1874-1964--Correspondence.
House, Edward Mandell, 1858-1938--Correspondence.
Hurley, Edward N. (Edward Nash), 1864-1933--Correspondence.
Knapp, Harry Shepard, 1856-1923--Correspondence.
La Farge, John, 1880-1963--Correspondence.
Lansing, Robert, 1864-1928--Correspondence.
Lasker, Albert Davis, 1880-1952--Correspondence.
March, Peyton Conway, 1864-1955--Correspondence.
McGowan, Samuel, 1870-1934--Correspondence.
Niblack, Albert P. (Albert Parker), 1859-1929--Correspondence.
Peoples, C. J.--Correspondence.
Pershing, John J. (John Joseph), 1860-1948--Correspondence.
Phelan, James D. (James Duval), 1861-1930.
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945--Correspondence.

Scott, Hugh Lenox, 1853-1934--Correspondence.
Sims, William Sowden, 1858-1936--Correspondence.
Teal, Joseph Nathan, 1858-1929--Correspondence.
Tillman, Benjamin R. (Benjamin Ryan), 1847-1918--Correspondence.
Wilson, Henry B.--Correspondence.
Wilson, Woodrow, 1856-1924--Correspondence.

Organizations

Allied and Associated Powers (1914-1920)
Allied Naval Armistice Commission.
Allied Naval Council.
Catholic Church--Societies, etc.
National Council of Catholic Men (U.S.)
Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920)
Philadelphia Naval Shipyard (Philadelphia, Pa.)
United States. American Commission to Negotiate Peace.
United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Naval Affairs.
United States. Navy.
United States. Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.
United States. Shipping Board.

Subjects

Disarmament.
Merchant marine--United States.
Navy-yards and naval stations--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.
Shipping--United States.
World War, 1914-1918--Naval operations, American.
World War, 1914-1918--Peace.

Places

United States--Foreign relations--1913-1921.

Occupations

Naval officers.
Public officials.

Provenance

The papers of William Shepherd Benson, naval officer and public official, were deposited in the Library of Congress in 1962 by Benson's son, Howard Hartwell James Benson. Between 1963 and 1966, Howard Hartwell James Benson gave additional papers to the Library and in 1969 converted the deposit of 1962 to a gift. Other papers relating to Benson were transferred to the Library by the Naval Historical Center in 1977.

Processing History

The papers of William Shepherd Benson were arranged and described in 1977. The finding aid was revised in 2011.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of William Shepherd Benson 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 William Shepherd Benson 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, William Shepherd Benson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1855, Sept. 25	Born, Macon, Bibb County, Ga.
1877	Graduated, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1877-1888	Duty in <i>Hartford</i> (sloop), <i>Constitution</i> (frigate), and <i>Yantic</i> (gunboat)
1879	Married Mary Augusta Wyse
1888-1889	Duty in <i>Dolphin</i> (despatch boat)
1890-1893	Duty at the Coast and Geodetic Survey, Lighthouse Survey, and as instructor, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1893	Promoted to lieutenant
1896-1898	Instructor, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1901-1903	Assistant to the commandant of midshipmen, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1905	Promoted to commander
1907-1908	Commandant of midshipmen, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1908-1910	Commanded <i>Albany</i> (cruiser), Pacific Fleet, and chief of staff of the fleet
1909	Promoted to captain
1910-1913	Commanded <i>Utah</i> (battleship), flagship of the Atlantic Fleet
1913-1915	Commandant, United States Navy Yard, Philadelphia, Pa.
1915	Promoted to rear admiral
1915-1919	Chief of naval operations
1916	Promoted to admiral
1917	Member, House Mission; appointed by President Woodrow Wilson to confer with Allied and Associated Powers in Europe
1918-1919	Member of special mission abroad; naval representative in drawing up naval terms of armistice with Central Powers; naval adviser to American Commission to Negotiate Peace
1919	Retired from United States Navy
1920-1921	Chairman, United States Shipping Board
1921-1925	President, National Council of Catholic Men
1921-1928	Commissioner, United States Shipping Board
1923	Published <i>The Merchant Marine</i> . New York: Macmillan
1932, May 20	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of William Shepherd Benson (1855-1932) span the years circa 1791-1952, with the bulk of the material dating from 1915 to 1928. The papers consist of family papers, correspondence, reports, dispatches, telegrams, memoranda, speeches, orders, appointments, printed matter, newspaper clippings, maps, photographs, broadsides, and miscellaneous

related material and are organized into the following series: [General Correspondence](#), [Subject File](#), [Speeches](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Oversize](#).

[General Correspondence](#) pertains primarily to Benson's naval duties from 1915 to 1928, except for considerable correspondence concerning various activities of the Catholic Church. The greater part of the collection concerns Benson's service as chief of naval operations, 1915-1919; as member of a commission appointed by President Woodrow Wilson to confer with the Allied and Associated Powers in Europe, 1917-1919; and as member of a special mission abroad as naval representative in drawing up naval terms of armistice with the Central Powers, and naval adviser to the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1918-1919. The remaining material chiefly concerns Benson's service on the United States Shipping Board, 1920-1928; his term as president, National Council of Catholic Men, 1921-1925; the Naval Conference of 1917; and his service as commandant of the Philadelphia Naval Yard, 1913-1915. There is little material concerning Benson's career preceding 1913 and after 1928.

Among the prominent correspondents in the collection are Bernard M. Baruch, Reginald Rowan Belknap, Tasker Howard Bliss, William Banks Caperton, Michael Joseph Curley, Josephus Daniels, Duncan Upshaw Fletcher, Guy Despard Goff, Edward Mandell House, Edward N. Hurley, Harry Shepard Knapp, John La Farge, Robert Lansing, Albert Davis Lasker, Peyton Conway March, Samuel McGowan, C. J. Peoples, John J. Pershing, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Hugh Lenox Scott, William Sowden Sims, Joseph Nathan Teal, Benjamin R. Tillman, and Henry B. Wilson. The [Subject File](#) is organized within three major headings: Armistice, Allied Naval Council, and Peace Conference, 1918-1919; Naval Conference of 1917 (Edward Mandell House Mission); and naval matters (miscellaneous), 1917-1926. Correspondents of note at the Paris Peace Conference include Norman H. Davis, Joseph C. Grew, Woodrow Wilson, and Admirals Philip Andrews, William Hannum Grubb Bullard, and Albert P. Niblack.

The [Miscellany](#) series includes material concerning the Army and Navy Country Club, transcripts of congressional hearings on the Navy Department, a bound volume of letters and miscellaneous items from a testimonial dinner in honor of Benson, scrapbooks, broadsides, and other printed matter.

Additional Benson papers received by the Library in 1963-1977 include letters received, transcripts of congressional hearings, speeches, orders, scrapbooks, and miscellaneous printed matter. Much of the correspondence pertains to letters of congratulations on Benson's various naval appointments, but there is also considerable information on the Versailles Peace Commission, on naval disarmament, and on the United States Shipping Board. Two additional topics of importance in this segment of the papers are the 1920 Senate Naval Affairs Committee hearings regarding naval operations in World War I, and Benson's extensive involvement in Catholic religious and fraternal organizations. Correspondents include Charles Francis Adams, Newton Diehl Baker, Montague C. Browning, James Gibbons, Herbert Hoover, Edward Mandell House, James D. Phelan, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in five series:

- [General Correspondence, 1874-1952](#)
- [Subject File, 1917-1926](#)
- [Speeches, 1917-1930](#)
- [Miscellany, circa 1791-1943](#)
- [Oversize, 1879-1920](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-30	<p><u>General Correspondence, 1874-1952</u></p> <p>Letters sent and received. Arranged in two groups, one chronologically, 1874-1952; the other, alphabetically, 1920-1928.</p>
BOX 31-43	<p><u>Subject File, 1917-1926</u></p> <p>Letters, reports, memoranda, dispatches, telegrams, notes, printed matter, newspaper clippings, maps, charts, and miscellaneous related material. Arranged alphabetically by subject.</p>
BOX 44	<p><u>Speeches, 1917-1930</u></p> <p>Handwritten, typewritten, and near-print copies of speeches. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 45-55	<p><u>Miscellany, circa 1791-1943</u></p> <p>Early family papers, financial papers, memoranda, miscellaneous writings, newspaper clippings, orders and appointments, photographs, printed matter, material concerning the Army and Navy Country Club, transcripts of congressional hearings on the Navy Department, bound volume of letters and miscellaneous items from a testimonial dinner in honor of Benson, scrapbooks, and broadsides. Arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX OV 1-OV 6	<p><u>Oversize, 1879-1943</u></p> <p>Certificates, pamphlets, and scrapbooks. Arranged and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed.</p>

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-30	General Correspondence, 1874-1952 Letters sent and received. Arranged in two groups, one chronologically, 1874-1952; the other, alphabetically, 1920-1928.
BOX 1	Chronological file
BOX 1	1874-1915
BOX 2	1916-1917, Feb.
BOX 3	1917
BOX 3	Mar.-May
BOX 4	June-Aug.
BOX 5	Sept.-Dec.
BOX 6	1918
BOX 6	Jan.-Mar.
BOX 7	Apr.-May
BOX 8	June-July
BOX 9	Aug.-Sept.
BOX 10	Oct.-Dec.
BOX 11	1919
BOX 11	Jan.-May
BOX 12	June-Aug.
BOX 13	1919, Sept.-1922
BOX 14	1923-1929
BOX 14A	1930-1952, undated
BOX 15	Alphabetical file, 1920-1928
BOX 15	A-Book
BOX 16	Boone-Carden
BOX 17	Cardinal Gibbons Institute
BOX 18	Carm-Cut
BOX 19	D
BOX 20	E-Gat
BOX 21	Gav-Hind
BOX 22	Hinds-I
BOX 23	Jack-Liv
BOX 24	Lock-McCor
BOX 25	McCor-O'Hara
BOX 26	O'Hern Retreats
BOX 27	Rev-Sher
BOX 28	Shib-Tea
BOX 29	Teal-Watt
BOX 30	Webs-Z

General Correspondence, 1874-1952

Container	Contents
BOX 30	Alphabetical index by name or subject to the original arrangement of Benson's correspondence and other papers as chief of naval operations, 1916-1919
BOX 31-43	Subject File, 1917-1926 Letters, reports, memoranda, dispatches, telegrams, notes, printed matter, newspaper clippings, maps, charts, and miscellaneous related material. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX 31	Armistice, Allied Naval Council, Peace Conference, 1918-1919
BOX 31	Admiralty reports
BOX 31	Adriatic operations
BOX 31	Actions of Italians
BOX 31	Austria-Hungary armistice
BOX 31	Austrian field party
BOX 31	Austrian ships
BOX 31	Austrian merchant ships
BOX 31	Blockade
BOX 32	Italian-French relations
BOX 32	Jugo-Slavs
BOX 32	Naval conditions, surrender of Austrian ships
BOX 32	Personnel in Adriatic
BOX 32	Vessels in Adriatic
BOX 32	Yugoslavia <i>See same container; Jugo-Slavs</i>
BOX 32	General
BOX 33	General
BOX 34	General
BOX 34	Aeronautical Commission
BOX 34	Allied Naval Council
BOX 35	Arkansas (battleship)
BOX 35	Disposition of enemy warships
BOX 35	German armistice
BOX 35	German cables
BOX 35	German field party
BOX 35	German merchant ships
BOX 36	German merchant ships
BOX 36	German passenger ships
BOX 36	League of Nations
BOX 36	Miscellaneous papers
BOX 37-38	Miscellaneous papers
BOX 39	Miscellaneous papers
BOX 39	Naval armaments
BOX 39	Naval conditions with Germany
BOX 40	Naval conditions with Germany
BOX 40	Naval terms of peace
BOX 41	Naval terms of peace
BOX 41	Political situation
BOX 41	Transportation of Woodrow Wilson

Subject File, 1917-1926

Container	Contents
BOX 42	Naval Conference of 1917 (House mission)
BOX 42	Naval matters, miscellaneous
BOX 42	1917-1926
BOX 43	1917-1926
BOX 44	Speeches, 1917-1930 Handwritten, typewritten, and near-print copies of speeches. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 44	1917-1930, undated
BOX 45-55	Miscellany, circa 1791-1943 Early family papers, financial papers, memoranda, miscellaneous writings, newspaper clippings, orders and appointments, photographs, printed matter, material concerning the Army and Navy Country Club, transcripts of congressional hearings on the Navy Department, bound volume of letters and miscellaneous items from a testimonial dinner in honor of Benson, scrapbooks, and broadsides. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 45	Army and Navy Country Club, 1925-1928
BOX 45	Catholic matter, 1919-1920, undated <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 45	Family papers, circa 1791-1839, undated
BOX 45	Financial
BOX 45	General and biographical material, 1879, undated <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 45	Duffy-Daniels correspondence, 1932-1933
BOX 46	Memoranda and miscellaneous writings
BOX 46	Newspaper clippings, 1909-1930
BOX 46	Orders and appointments, 1847-1931, undated
BOX 46	Photographs
BOX 46	Printed matter
BOX 47	Printed matter
BOX 48	Testimonial dinners, 1925
BOX 49	Investigation of the Navy Department, transcripts of hearings, 1920 (6 vols.)
BOX 50	(4 vols.)
BOX 51-55	Scrapbooks, 1900-1943 <i>See Oversize</i> (5 vols)
BOX OV 1-OV 6	Oversize, 1879-1943 Certificates, pamphlets, and scrapbooks. Arranged and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Miscellany
BOX OV 1	Catholic matter, 1919-1920 (Container 45)
BOX OV 1	General and biographical material, 1879 (Container 45)
BOX OV 2-OV 6	Scrapbooks, 1900-1943 (Containers 51-55)