Collection Summary

Title: Washington Irving Chambers Papers
Inclusive Dates: 1871-1943
Bulk Dates: 1911-1919
ID No.: MSS50799
Creator: Chambers, Washington Irving, 1856-1934
Extent: 12,000 items
Extent: 48 containers
Extent: 12 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm70050799
Summary: Naval officer. Correspondence, subject files, logbooks, memoranda, blueprints, photographs, printed matter, and other papers relating primarily to Chambers's service in the navy and with the Greely Relief Expedition to the Arctic and the Nicaragua Canal survey expedition of 1884-1885.

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
Baldwin, Thomas S. (Thomas Scott), 1854-1923--Correspondence.
Burgess, W. Starling (William Starling), 1878-1947--Correspondence.
Curtiss, Glenn Hammond, 1878-1930--Correspondence.
Ellyson, Theodore Gordon, 1885-1928--Correspondence.
Ely, Eugene Burton, 1886-1911--Correspondence.
Godard, Louis, 1847-1928--Correspondence.
Knabenshue, Roy, -1960--Correspondence.
Loening, Grover, 1888-1976--Correspondence.
Martin, Glenn L. (Glenn Luther), 1886-1955--Correspondence.
Means, James, 1853-1920--Correspondence.
Richardson, Holden Chester, 1878--Correspondence.
Rodgers, John, 1881-1926--Correspondence.
Towers, John H. (John Henry), 1885-1955--Correspondence.

Organizations
Greely Relief Expedition (1884)
Naval War College (U.S.)
New York Naval Shipyard.
Pensacola (Screw steamer)
Portsmouth (Sloop of war)
United States Naval Torpedo Station (Newport, R.I)
United States. Navy Department.

Subjects
Aeronautics.
Airships.
Balloons.
Acquisition Information

The papers of Washington Irving Chambers, naval officer, were deposited in the Library of Congress by the Naval Historical Foundation from 1954 to 1962 and converted to a gift in 1998.

Processing History

The collection was processed in 1967. The finding aid was revised in 2011.

Additional Guides

In 1967 the Library published Washington Irving Chambers, a Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Washington Irving Chambers in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the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 Washington Irving Chambers 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, Washington Irving Chambers Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
### Biographical Note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1856, Apr. 4</td>
<td>Born, Kingston, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Graduated, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1877-1878</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Pensacola</em> (Screw steamer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1879-1882</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Marion</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883-1884</td>
<td>Duty in the Bureau of Navigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Thetis</em> and <em>Alert</em>, Greely Relief Expedition to the Arctic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884-1888</td>
<td>Duty in the Office of Naval Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888-1889</td>
<td>Duty in the New York Naval Shipyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889-1891</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Petrel</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-1892</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Atlanta</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Married Isabella Reynolds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-1893</td>
<td>Duty at Naval War College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-1897</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Minneapolis</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898-1899</td>
<td>Duty in Newport Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899-1900</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Texas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-1902</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Annapolis</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Frolic</em></td>
</tr>
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<td>1902-1904</td>
<td>Duty in Newport Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905-1906</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Nashville</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-1907</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Florida</em> and <em>Newark</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907-1909</td>
<td>Assistant chief, Bureau of Ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Louisiana</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Assistant in charge of aviation matters, Navy Department General Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1911</td>
<td>Arranged aviation test flights from ships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1913</td>
<td>In charge of aviation matters, Bureau of Navigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Ordered to retirement from navy; consented to remain on active duty at retired pay in Division of Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chairman of board to study the needs of an aeronautical organization within the navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Established the first Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Fla.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915-1919</td>
<td>In charge of aviation matters, Naval Operations Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Released from all active duty and retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934, Sept. 23</td>
<td>Died en route to Washington, D.C., from the Pacific Coast</td>
</tr>
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### Scope and Content Note

The papers of Washington Irving Chambers (1856-1934) span the years 1871-1943, with the bulk of the material falling between the years 1911 and 1919. The collection consists primarily of correspondence, subject files, and logbooks, supplemented by journals, notebooks, memoranda, reports, designs, blueprints, photographs, printed matter, newspaper clippings, and miscellaneous material. The collection is roughly divided into two parts: pre-1910 material generally concerned with Chambers's naval career and his activities as an officer at sea and on land; and post-1910 material relating to Chambers's interests in the newly emerging field of naval aviation and his role as one of the pioneer naval officers in
aviation. Chambers's accomplishments as a pioneer naval officer in aviation activities tend to obscure many of his earlier achievements in the fleet, at the United Naval Torpedo Station, Newport, Rhode Island, in the New York Naval Shipyard, and in the administrative offices of the Navy Department. There is relatively little material concerning Chambers's personal or family life. The collection is organized into six series: Official Correspondence; General Correspondence; Subject File; Aircraft Logbooks; Naval Logbooks, Notebooks, Journals, and Order Books; and Miscellany.

Chambers's pre-aviation career, during which he advanced from midshipman to captain, is thoroughly documented. Included are journals, logbooks, and notebooks, several containers each of official and general correspondence, and assorted material. Many of Chambers's early reports, memoranda, and recommendations have been retained, most of them in his own handwriting. After graduation from the United States Naval Academy in 1876, Chambers's career was that of a typical line officer, with alternate tours of duty at sea and ashore. He served afloat as a midshipman from 1876 to 1878 in the screw steamer Pensacola and sloop of war Portsmouth. In the years from 1878 to 1910 his sea service broadened to include duty in just about every type and variety of ship that was then afloat in the United States Navy. Of exceptional interest are the records of his participation in the Greely Relief Expedition to the Arctic in 1884 and his participation in the Nicaraguan Canal Survey Expedition of 1884-1885. Chambers, in his years at sea, served in both the Pacific and the Atlantic squadrons, and his letters, logbooks, reports, recommendations, and other papers generated on board the ships he served, give evidence of his duty as a navigator, shiphandler, and seaman and of the growth of the United States Navy.

Alternating with his sea service Chambers's shore duty included tours at the Bureau of Navigation, at the Naval War College, at the Bureau of Ordnance, and at the Torpedo Station in Newport, Rhode Island. He was a member successively of the Navy Department's General Board, Board on Rules for the Construction of Vessels, and Board on Rules for Steamship Inspection, and finally an assistant to the aide for material of the General Board. Letters, reports, memoranda, and printed material, especially Chambers's personal evaluations and recommendations, originating during these tours of duty, demonstrate that he was a capable officer, well experienced, and above all thoroughly versed in the specialities of ordnance, intelligence, construction and repair of ships, and naval armament. Chambers began early the practice of submitting intelligence reports and of making specific recommendations for improvements in guns, mines, torpedoes, and other ordnance. He also suggested new designs or better construction methods for work on naval vessels.

In September 1910 Chambers was detached from command of the battleship Louisiana and reported ashore on orders from the secretary of the navy “to keep himself informed on aviation matters.” Thus began his career in naval aviation. Although without official title, Chambers was the first director of Naval Aviation and served as such until several months after the end of World War I. Papers in this collection representing these ten years, the most important in his military career, pertain almost exclusively to the development of a naval air service and of naval aircraft. Within the general topic of naval aviation, Chambers covered a variety of specific subjects including dirigibles, helicopters, balloons, aviation camps, parachutes, and transatlantic flights.

Chambers was the chief correspondent for the Navy Department in its dealings with airplane manufacturers such as the Wright Company, Glenn Hammond Curtiss, W. Starling Burgess, and other manufacturers. Correspondence concerning would-be inventors and inventions offers insight into the early technology of aviation mechanisms. The collection includes correspondence with such well-known names in the aviation field as Thomas S. Baldwin, Theodore Gordon Ellyson, Eugene Ely, Louis Godard, Roy Knabenshue, Grover Loening, Glenn L. Martin, James Means, Holden Chester Richardson, John Rodgers, and John H. Towers. The training methods of the early aviators, the testing given their aircraft, and the instruction given to fledgling pilots are documented in the General Correspondence and Subject File. The material for the decade from 1910 to 1920 includes correspondence, reports, memoranda, blueprints, designs, printed matter, photographs, and aviation logbooks.

**Arrangement of the Papers**

The collection is arranged in six series:

- Official Correspondence, 1871-1934
- General Correspondence, 1874-1943
- Subject File, 1884-1917
- Aircraft Logbooks, 1911-1917
- Naval Logbooks, Notebooks, Journals, and Order Books, 1872-1909
- Miscellany, 1884-1932
## Description of Series

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<th>Series</th>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 1-4</td>
<td><strong>Official Correspondence, 1871-1934</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Official letters sent and received.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arranged chronologically.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 5-24</td>
<td><strong>General Correspondence, 1874-1943</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letters sent and received, orders, reports, memoranda, designs, and blueprints.</td>
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<td>Arranged in two files, chronological and subject, with subject material organized alphabetically.</td>
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<td>BOX 25-36</td>
<td><strong>Subject File, 1884-1917</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Memoranda, designs, blueprints, notes, photographs, printed matter, and newspaper clippings.</td>
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<td>BOX 37-40</td>
<td><strong>Aircraft Logbooks, 1911-1917</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Test data, training information, performance charts, reports, and operational data.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Arranged alphabetically by name of airplane manufacturing company.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 41-43</td>
<td><strong>Naval Logbooks, Notebooks, Journals, and Order Books, 1872-1909</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Logbooks, journals, order books and other accounts.</td>
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<td>Arranged chronologically and identified according to type of volume.</td>
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<td>BOX 44-48</td>
<td><strong>Miscellany, 1884-1932</strong></td>
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<td>Photographs, poetry, literary work, newspaper clippings, printed matter, a biographical file, awards, diplomas, drawings, notes, articles, and memoranda.</td>
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## Container List

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<td>1871-1893</td>
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<td>1894-1905</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>1906-1910</td>
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<td>BOX 4</td>
<td>1911-1934, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 5-24</td>
<td><strong>General Correspondence, 1874-1943</strong>&lt;br&gt;Letters sent and received, orders, reports, memoranda, designs, and blueprints.&lt;br&gt;Arranged in two files, chronological and subject, with subject material organized alphabetically.</td>
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<td>BOX 7</td>
<td>1920-1934, 1943, undated</td>
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<td>BOX 8</td>
<td>Subject&lt;br&gt;“A” miscellaneous&lt;br&gt;Adams &amp; Co.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Aerial Age</strong>&lt;br&gt;Aero Club of America&lt;br&gt;Aero Club of Illinois&lt;br&gt;Aeromotion Co. of America&lt;br&gt;Aeronautical Congress, Turin, Italy&lt;br&gt;Aeronautical Exposition, New York, N.Y.&lt;br&gt;Aeronautical laboratories</td>
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<td>BOX 9</td>
<td>Aeronautical reserves&lt;br&gt;Aeronautical Society&lt;br&gt;<strong>Aeronautes</strong> magazine&lt;br&gt;Aircraft carriers&lt;br&gt;Airplanes&lt;br&gt;Carburetors&lt;br&gt;Engines&lt;br&gt;Hangers&lt;br&gt;Instruments&lt;br&gt;Landing devices</td>
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<td>BOX 10</td>
<td>Launching devices&lt;br&gt;Navigation&lt;br&gt;Paint&lt;br&gt;Parts</td>
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|          | Speed indicators  
|          | Stabilizers  
|          | Starters  
|          | Albree, George  
|          | American Dirigible Balloon Syndicate  

| BOX 11 | American Duralumin Co.  
|        | American Hydroplane Co.  
|        | Armstrong, E. B.  
|        | Austrian Aircraft Co.  
|        | Aviation  
|        | Appropriations  
|        | Bombing  
|        | Camps  
|        | Establishment  
|        | Organization  

| BOX 12 | Annapolis, Md.  
|        | Guantanamo Bay, Cuba  
|        | San Diego, Calif.  
|        | Catapults  
|        | Contests  
|        | Nomenclature  
|        | Overseas (foreign)  

| BOX 13 | Overseas (foreign)  
|        | Argentina  
|        | Canada  
|        | France  
|        | Germany  
|        | Great Britain  
|        | Radio developments  
|        | Safety  
|        | Warfare  
|        | “B” miscellaneous  
|        | Baldwin, Thomas Scott  
|        | Belgian Military Mission  
|        | Benoist (Thomas) Aircraft Co.  
|        | Bristol Co.  
|        | Buff & Buff Manufacturing Co.  
|        | Burgess (W. Starling) Co. & Curtis  
|        | (1 folder)  

| BOX 14 | (1 folder)  
|        | Burridge, Lee L.  
|        | Burt, C. P.  
|        | Butler, Paul J.  
|        | “C” miscellaneous  
|        | Collier Flying Boat Co.  
|        | Curtiss Aeroplane Co.  

Washington Irving Chambers Papers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
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| BOX 15    | Curtiss, Glenn Hammond  
|           | “D” miscellaneous  
|           | Derby Aerial Car  
|           | Dirigibles  
|           | Douglas, Donald W.  
|           | Doyle, Edward C.  
|           | “E” miscellaneous  
|           | Ellyson, Theodore Gordon  
|           | (8 folders) |
| BOX 16    | Ellyson, Theodore Gordon (photostats)  
|           | (5 folders)  
|           | Ely, Eugene  
|           | “F” miscellaneous  
|           | Farman Co.  
|           | Flindt, Charles  
|           | Ford, William T.  
|           | Franklin Institute  
|           | “G” miscellaneous  
|           | Gallaudet (Edson) Engineering Co.  
|           | Geyer, Charles R.  
|           | Godard, Louis  
|           | Grant, Randolph S.  
| BOX 17    | Gyro Motor Co.  
|           | “H” miscellaneous  
|           | Hanscom, Clarence D.  
|           | Harkness, Harry  
|           | Harriman, J. Emery  
|           | Hazard, Gould & Co.  
|           | Helicopters  
|           | Herbster, V. D.  
|           | Hill, W. H.  
|           | “I” miscellaneous  
|           | Industrial Instrument Co.  
|           | Inventors and Inventions  
|           | (1 folder) |
| BOX 18    | (1 folder)  
|           | “J” miscellaneous  
|           | Joplin Monoplane, Windata and Aerograph Co.  
| BOX 19    | “K” miscellaneous  
|           | Keuffel & Esser Co.  
|           | Knabenshue, Roy  
|           | “L” miscellaneous  
|           | Langley Aerodynamic Laboratory  
|           | Lawson Publishing Co.  
|           | Leatheroid Manufacturing Co.  
|           | Linthicum, W. D.  
<p>|           | Loening, Grover |</p>
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<td>National Seamless Boat Co.</td>
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<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>License applications</td>
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<td>Reserves</td>
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<td>Specifications</td>
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<td>“O” miscellaneous</td>
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<td>O’Leary, John and Molly</td>
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<td>Olmsted, Frederic L.</td>
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<td>Parachutes</td>
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<td>Parisano, Michael</td>
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<td>Pilot equipment</td>
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<td>Pioneer Instrument Co.</td>
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<td>Propellers</td>
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<td>Redmond, Edmond</td>
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<td>Reiferscheid (William) &amp; Co.</td>
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<td>Requests for photographs</td>
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<td>Richardson, Holden Chester</td>
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<td>Ritchie (E. S.) &amp; Sons</td>
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<td>Romeike (Henry) Inc.</td>
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<td>Sloane Aeroplane Co.</td>
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<td>Sperry Gyroscope Co.</td>
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Submarines
“T” miscellaneous
Thomas Brothers Aeroplane Co.
Towers, John H.
Transatlantic flights
Transportation orders

BOX 24
Tulsa Motor Co.
“U-V” miscellaneous
Van Wye, G. P.
“W-Z” miscellaneous
Willoughby Aeroplane Co.
Wright Co.
Yates, Robert

BOX 25-36 Subject File, 1884-1917
Memoranda, designs, blueprints, notes, photographs, printed matter, and newspaper clippings.

BOX 25
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Aeronautical Society, 1911-1914

BOX 26
Airplanes, 1910-1917
Compasses
Designs
Engines
Instruments
Paint

BOX 27
Aviation, 1910-1915

BOX 28
Burgess Co. & Curtis , 1914
Centrifugal Force Convertor, undated
Curtiss Aeroplane Co., 1912-1913
Dirigibles. 1911-1914
Foreign navies, 1887-1910

BOX 29
Harriman, J. Emery, 1911-1912
Hydroaeroplanes, 1911-1913
Naval War College, 1884-1897

BOX 30
Navy yards, 1888-1913
Nicaraguan Canal Survey Expedition, 1884-1892

BOX 31
Nicaraguan Canal Survey Expedition
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BOX 33
Torpedoes, 1911-1914
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Seamanship, 1886-1905
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| BOX 34 | Battleships  
|        | Designs and specifications  
|        | Engineering  
|        | Sails  
| BOX 35 | Sketches  
|        | Steering compasses  
|        | Submarines  
|        | Torpedo boats  
|        | Topographical maps, 1910-1911  
|        | Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I., undated  
|        | Unitarian sermons of U. G. B. Pierce  
|        | 1914-1916  
|        | 1932, 1934  
| BOX 36 | United States Navy, 1884-1897  
|        | Wright Co., 1913-1914  
| BOX 37-40 | Aircraft Logbooks, 1911-1917  
|         | Test data, training information, performance charts, reports, and operational data.  
|         | Arranged alphabetically by name of airplane manufacturing company.  
| BOX 37 | Burgess Co.  
|        | Burgess-Dunne Pusher Biplane, 1915-1917  
|        | Burgess Flying Boat D-1, 1913-1914  
|        | Burgess Flying Boat D-2, 1913-1914  
| BOX 38 | Curtiss Co.  
|        | Curtiss Single Pontoon, 1911-1915  
|        | Curtiss Flying Boat C-1, 1912-1914  
|        | Curtiss Hydroplane A-1, 1911-1912  
|        | Curtiss Hydroplane A-1 (printed copy), 1911-1912  
|        | Curtiss Pusher 63A (stricken from navy list), Feb. 1917  
| BOX 39 | Curtiss Pusher Biplane, 1914-1917  
|        | Curtiss Pusher Biplane Fly-boat, 1914-1917  
|        | Curtiss Pusher Biplane Single Pontoon AH13, 1915-1917  
|        | Curtiss Pusher Biplane Single Pontoon AH15  
|        | Curtiss Pusher Biplane Single Pontoon, 1915-1916  
|        | Curtiss Pusher Biplane Triple Pontoon, 1914-1916  
| BOX 39 | Curtiss Student Aviator A57, 1917  
|        | Curtiss Student Aviator A58, 1917  
| BOX 40 | Gallaudet Co., Gallaudet Nacelle Pusher, Mar. 1917  
|        | Sturtevant Co., Sturtevant Tractor Biplane Pontoon, 1916-1917  
| BOX 40 | Thomas Co.  
|        | Thomas Tractor Biplane Pt. 1, 1916-1917  
|        | Thomas Tractor Biplane Pt. 2, 1916  
| BOX 40 | Wright Co.  
|        | Wright B-1, 1911-1913  
|        | Wright Biplane Twin Pontoon, 1916-1917  
|        | Wright Hydroplane B-2, 1912-1916  

Washington Irving Chambers Papers
Wright Navy Built B-3, 1913
Nine undated logs, AB-1, AB-2, AB-6, AB-7, AH-1, AH-4, AH-5, AH-6, AX-1

**BOX 41-43**  
**Naval Logbooks, Notebooks, Journals, and Order Books, 1872-1909**  
Logbooks, journals, order books and other accounts.  
Arranged chronologically and identified according to type of volume.

**BOX 41**  
Logbooks, *Constellation*  
9 June-2 Sept. 1872
4 June-27 Aug. 1873
13 June-22 Aug. 1874

**BOX 42**  
Notebooks  
1872-1876
1876
Journals  
Nicaraguan Survey Expedition, 1884-1885  
*Pensacola*, 1876-1877  
1876-1879

**BOX 43**  
*Portsmouth*, 1877-1888  
Notebooks  
Torpedo warfare  
1892
1893
*Minneapolis*, 1895-1896  
Fleet maneuvers, 1897
Journals  
*Texas* (typescript of a diary of C. E. King), 1898  
*Annapolis*, 1901
Order book, *Annapolis*, 1900-1901

**BOX 44-48**  
**Miscellany, 1884-1932**  
Photographs, poetry, literary work, newspaper clippings, printed matter, a biographical file, awards, diplomas, drawings, notes, articles, and memoranda.  
Arranged by type of material.

**BOX 44**  
Photographs, 1884-1911

**BOX 45**  
Poetry and literary works, mostly undated

**BOX 46**  
Newspaper clippings, 1911-1917

**BOX 47**  
Printed matter, 1911-1917

**BOX 48**  
Biographical file (mainly Chambers's retirement), 1912-1932  
Awards and diplomas, 1887-1915  
Drawings, notes, articles, and memoranda, mostly undated