

Washington Irving Chambers Papers

A Finding Aid to the Papers in the Naval Historical Foundation Collection in the Library of Congress



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

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

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm70050799>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms011189>

Prepared by J. McElroy

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2011
Revised 2022 March

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.
Chambers, Washington Irving, 1856-1934.
Curtiss, Glenn Hammond, 1878-1930--Correspondence.
Ellyson, Theodore Gordon, 1885-1928--Correspondence.
Ely, Eugene Burton, 1886-1911--Correspondence.
Godard, Louis, 1847-1928--Correspondence.
Greely, A. W. (Adolphus Washington), 1844-1935.
Knabenshue, Roy, -1960--Correspondence.
Loening, Grover, 1888-1976--Correspondence.
Martin, Glenn L. (Glenn Luther), 1886-1955--Correspondence.
Means, James, 1853-1920--Correspondence.
Richardson, Holden C., 1878-1960--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.
United States. Navy Department. Bureau of Navigation.
United States. Navy Department. Bureau of Ordnance.
United States. Navy--Aviation.

Subjects

Aeronautics.
Airships.
Balloons.

Canals--Nicaragua.
Flight.
Fortification--Rhode Island.
Helicopters.
Naval aviation--United States.
Navy-yards and naval stations--New York (State)--New York.
Navy-yards and naval stations--Rhode Island--Newport.
Ordnance, Naval.
Parachutes.
Shipbuilding.

Places

Arctic regions--Discovery and exploration.
Nicaragua Canal (Nicaragua)
Nicaragua--Discovery and exploration.

Occupations

Naval officers.

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

Date	Event
1856, Apr. 4	Born, Kingston, N.Y.
1876	Graduated, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md. Duty in <i>Pensacola</i> (Screw steamer)
1877-1878	Duty in <i>Portsmouth</i> (Sloop of war)
1879-1882	Duty in <i>Marion</i> Promoted to ensign
1883-1884	Duty in the Bureau of Navigation
1884	Duty in <i>Thetis</i> and <i>Alert</i> , Greely Relief Expedition to the Arctic
1884-1888	Duty in the Office of Naval Intelligence Promoted to lieutenant, junior grade
1888-1889	Duty in the New York Naval Shipyard
1889-1891	Duty in <i>Petrel</i>
1891-1892	Duty in <i>Atlanta</i> Promoted to lieutenant
1892	Married Isabella Reynolds
1892-1893	Duty at Naval War College
1894-1895	Inspector of ordnance, Philadelphia, Pa.
1895-1897	Duty in <i>Minneapolis</i>
1898-1899	Duty in Newport Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I. Promoted to lieutenant commander
1899-1900	Duty in <i>Texas</i>
1900-1902	Duty in <i>Annapolis</i>
1902	Duty in <i>Frolic</i>
1902-1904	Duty in Newport Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I.
1905-1906	Duty in <i>Nashville</i>
1906-1907	Duty in <i>Florida</i> and <i>Newark</i>
1907-1909	Assistant chief, Bureau of Ordnance Promoted to captain
1909	Duty in <i>Louisiana</i>
1910	Assistant in charge of aviation matters, Navy Department General Board
1910-1911	Arranged aviation test flights from ships
1911-1913	In charge of aviation matters, Bureau of Navigation
1913	Ordered to retirement from navy; consented to remain on active duty at retired pay in Division of Operations Chairman of board to study the needs of an aeronautical organization within the navy
1914	Established the first Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Fla.
1915-1919	In charge of aviation matters, Naval Operations Office
1919	Released from all active duty and retired
1934, Sept. 23	Died enroute to Washington, D.C., from the Pacific Coast

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 specialties 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

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

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-4	Official Correspondence, 1871-1934 Official letters sent and received. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1	1871-1893
BOX 2	1894-1905
BOX 3	1906-1910
BOX 4	1911-1934, undated
BOX 5-24	General Correspondence, 1874-1943 Letters sent and received, orders, reports, memoranda, designs, and blueprints. Arranged in two files, chronological and subject, with subject material organized alphabetically.
BOX 5	Chronological 1874-1893
BOX 6	1894-1910
BOX 7	1920-1934, 1943, undated
BOX 8	Subject "A" miscellaneous Adams & Co. <i>Aerial Age</i> Aero Club of America Aero Club of Illinois Aeromotion Co. of America Aeronautical Congress, Turin, Italy Aeronautical Exposition, New York, N.Y. Aeronautical laboratories
BOX 9	Aeronautical reserves Aeronautical Society <i>Aeronautics</i> magazine Aircraft carriers Airplanes Carburetors Engines Hangers Instruments Landing devices
BOX 10	Launching devices Navigation Paint Parts

General Correspondence, 1874-1943

Container

Contents

	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.

General Correspondence, 1874-1943

Container

Contents

BOX 15	Curtiss, Glenn Hammond
	“D” miscellaneous
	Derby Aerial Car
	Dirigibles
	Douglas, Donald W.
	Doyle, Edward C.
	“E” miscellaneous
	Ellyson, Theodore Gordon
	(8 folders)
	Ellyson, Theodore Gordon (photostats)
BOX 16	(5 folders)
	Ely, Eugene
	“F” miscellaneous
	Farman Co.
	Flindt, Charles
	Ford, William T.
	Franklin Institute
	“G” miscellaneous
	Gallaudet (Edson) Engineering Co.
	Geyer, Charles R.
BOX 17	Godard, Louis
	Grant, Randolph S.
	Gyro Motor Co.
	“H” miscellaneous
	Hanscom, Clarence D.
	Harkness, Harry
	Harriman, J. Emery
	Hazard, Gould & Co.
	Helicopters
	Herbster, V. D.
BOX 18	Hill, W. H.
	“I” miscellaneous
	Industrial Instrument Co.
	Inventors and Inventions
	(1 folder)
	(1 folder)
	“J” miscellaneous
	Joplin Monoplane, Windata and Aerograph Co.
	“K” miscellaneous
	Keuffel & Esser Co.
BOX 19	Knabenshue, Roy
	“L” miscellaneous
	Langley Aerodynamic Laboratory
	Lawson Publishing Co.
	Leatheroid Manufacturing Co.
	Linthicum, W. D.
	Loening, Grover

General Correspondence, 1874-1943

Container

Contents

	McCurdy, James A.
	“M” miscellaneous
	Martin, Glenn L.
	Means, James
	Merrill, Albert A.
	Moisant International Aviators
	Mullins (W. H.) Co.
BOX 20	“N” miscellaneous
	National Seamless Boat Co.
	Naval airplanes
	Architecture
	Aviation
	Appropriations
	Course instruction
	Institute
	License applications
	(1 folder)
BOX 21	(1 folder)
	Reserves
	Specifications
	Navy Department
	“O” miscellaneous
	O’Leary, John and Molly
	Olmsted, Frederic L.
	Ostheimer Brothers
	“P” miscellaneous
	Parachutes
	Parisano, Michael
	Pennie, Goldsborough & O’Neill
BOX 22	Pilot equipment
	Pioneer Instrument Co.
	Propellers
	“R” miscellaneous
	Redmond, Edmond
	Reiferscheid (William) & Co.
	Requests for photographs
	Richardson, Holden Chester
	Ritchie (E. S.) & Sons
	Roberts Motor Co.
	Rodgers, John
	Romeike (Henry) Inc.
	“S” miscellaneous
	Sirch-Todd Co.
BOX 23	Skerrett, Robert G.
	Sloane Aeroplane Co.
	Sperry Gyroscope Co.

General Correspondence, 1874-1943

Container	Contents
	Submarines "T" miscellaneous Thomas Brothers Aeroplane Co. Towers, John H. Transatlantic flights Transportation orders Tulsa Motor Co. "U-V" miscellaneous Van Wye, G. P. "W-Z" miscellaneous Willoughby Aeroplane Co. Wright Co. Yates, Robert
BOX 24	
BOX 25-36	Subject File, 1884-1917 Memoranda, designs, blueprints, notes, photographs, printed matter, and newspaper clippings.
BOX 25	Aeronautical Laboratory, 1910-1913 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 Converter, 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 Ordnance, 1884-1917 Mines Naval rifles Stores Target practice
BOX 32	Torpedoes
BOX 33	Torpedoes, 1911-1914 Richardson, Holden C., 1891-1899 Seamanship, 1886-1905 Armored cruisers

Subject File, 1884-1917

Container	Contents
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 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 38	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 Gallaudet Co., Gallaudet Nacelle Pusher, Mar. 1917 Sturtevant Co., Sturtevant Tractor Biplane Pontoon, 1916-1917 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

Aircraft Logbooks, 1911-1917

Container

Contents

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