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://lccn.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.
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 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.

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

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1856, Apr. 4</td>
<td>Born, Kingston, N.Y.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Graduated, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duty in <em>Pensacola</em> (Screw steamer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1877-1878</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Portsmouth</em> (Sloop of war)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1879-1882</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Marion</em></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1883-1884</td>
<td>Duty in the Bureau of Navigation</td>
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<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Thetis</em> and <em>Alert</em>, Greely Relief Expedition to the Arctic</td>
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<tr>
<td>1884-1888</td>
<td>Duty in the Office of Naval Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoted to lieutenant, junior grade</td>
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<td>1888-1889</td>
<td>Duty in the New York Naval Shipyard</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889-1891</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Petrel</em></td>
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<td>1891-1892</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Promoted to lieutenant</td>
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<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Married Isabella Reynolds</td>
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<tr>
<td>1892-1893</td>
<td>Duty at Naval War College</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895-1897</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Minneapolis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1898-1899</td>
<td>Duty in Newport Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoted to lieutenant commander</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899-1900</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Texas</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1900-1902</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Annapolis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Frolic</em></td>
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<tr>
<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>
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<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></td>
<td>Promoted to captain</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 enroute to Washington, D.C., from the Pacific Coast</td>
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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

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

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| 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.  
*Aerial Age*  
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  
*Aeronautics* magazine  
Aircraft carriers  
Airplanes  
Carburetors  
Engines  
Hangers  
Instruments  
Landing devices |
| BOX 10    | Launching devices  
Navigation  
Paint  
Parts |
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.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Container</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.  
|           | Loening, Grover  

**Washington Irving Chambers Papers**  
9
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
Sierzch-Todd Co.

**BOX 23**

Skerrett, Robert G.
Sloane Aeroplane Co.
Sperry Gyroscope Co.
General Correspondence, 1874-1943

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<th>Container</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submarines</td>
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<td>Thomas Brothers Aeroplane Co.</td>
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<td>Towers, John H.</td>
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<td>Transatlantic flights</td>
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<td>Transportation orders</td>
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<td>BOX 24</td>
<td>Tulsa Motor Co.</td>
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<td>Willoughby Aeroplane Co.</td>
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<td>Wright Co.</td>
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<td>Yates, Robert</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 25-36</td>
<td><strong>Subject File, 1884-1917</strong></td>
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<td>Memoranda, designs, blueprints, notes, photographs, printed matter, and newspaper clippings.</td>
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<td>BOX 25</td>
<td>Aeronautical Laboratory, 1910-1913</td>
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<td>Aeronautical Society, 1911-1914</td>
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<td>BOX 26</td>
<td>Airplanes, 1910-1917</td>
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<td>BOX 27</td>
<td>Aviation, 1910-1915</td>
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<td>BOX 28</td>
<td>Burgess Co. &amp; Curtis, 1914</td>
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<td>Centrifugal Force Convertor, undated</td>
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<td>Curtiss Aeroplane Co., 1912-1913</td>
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<td>Dirigibles, 1911-1914</td>
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<td>Foreign navies, 1887-1910</td>
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<td>BOX 29</td>
<td>Harriman, J. Emery, 1911-1912</td>
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<td>Hydroaeroplanes, 1911-1913</td>
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<td>Naval War College, 1884-1897</td>
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<td>BOX 30</td>
<td>Navy yards, 1888-1913</td>
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<td>Nicaraguan Canal Survey Expedition, 1884-1892</td>
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<td>BOX 31</td>
<td>Nicaraguan Canal Survey Expedition</td>
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<td>Ordnance, 1884-1917</td>
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<td>BOX 32</td>
<td>Torpedoes</td>
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<td>Torpedoes, 1911-1914</td>
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<td>Richardson, Holden C., 1891-1899</td>
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<td>Seamanship, 1886-1905</td>
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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  
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