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

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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 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.
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

<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duty in <em>Pensacola</em> (Screw steamer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877-1878</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Portsmouth</em> (Sloop of war)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-1882</td>
<td>Duty in <em>Marion</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoted to ensign</td>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoted to lieutenant, junior grade</td>
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<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></td>
<td>Promoted to lieutenant</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></td>
<td>Promoted to lieutenant commander</td>
</tr>
<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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>retired pay in Division of Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chairman of board to study the needs of an aeronautical organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>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 Greeley 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
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 1-4</td>
<td><strong>Official Correspondence, 1871-1934</strong></td>
<td>Official letters sent and received.</td>
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<td>BOX 5-24</td>
<td><strong>General Correspondence, 1874-1943</strong></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>
<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>
<td>Test data, training information, performance charts, reports, and operational data.</td>
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<td>Arranged alphabetically by name of airplane manufacturing company.</td>
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<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.</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Arranged by type of material.</td>
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# Container List

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<td><strong>Official Correspondence, 1871-1934</strong>&lt;br&gt;Official letters sent and received.&lt;br&gt;Arranged chronologically.</td>
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<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>1871-1893</td>
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<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>1894-1905</td>
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<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>1906-1910</td>
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<tr>
<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 5</td>
<td>Chronological&lt;br&gt;1874-1893</td>
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<td>BOX 6</td>
<td>1894-1910</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;<em>Aerial Age</em>&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;<em>Aeronautes</em> 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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*Washington Irving Chambers Papers*
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<td>Starters</td>
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<td>Albree, George</td>
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<td>American Dirigible Balloon Syndicate</td>
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<td>BOX 11</td>
<td>American Duralumin Co.</td>
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<td>American Hydroplane Co.</td>
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<td>Austrian Aircraft Co.</td>
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<td>Aviation</td>
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<td>Appropriations</td>
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<td>Great Britain</td>
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<td>Radio developments</td>
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<td>Safety</td>
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<td>Warfare</td>
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<td>“B” miscellaneous</td>
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<td>Baldwin, Thomas Scott</td>
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<td>Benoist (Thomas) Aircraft Co.</td>
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<td>Buff &amp; Buff Manufacturing Co.</td>
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<td>Burgess (W. Starling) Co. &amp; Curtis</td>
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<td>(1 folder)</td>
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<td>Burridge, Lee L.</td>
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<td>Burt, C. P.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Butler, Paul J.</td>
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<td>“C” miscellaneous</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collier Flying Boat Co.</td>
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<td>Curtiss Aeroplane Co.</td>
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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.  
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 17** | (1 folder)  
“J” miscellaneous  
Joplin Monoplane, Windata and Aerograph Co.  
“K” miscellaneous  
Keuffel & Esser Co.  
Knabenshue, Roy  
“L” miscellaneous  
Langley Aerodynamic Laboratory  
Lawson Publishing Co.  
Leatheroid Manufacturing Co.  
Linthicum, W. D.  
Loening, Grover |
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| BOX 20    | McCurdy, James A.  
|           | “M” miscellaneous  
|           | Martin, Glenn L.  
|           | Means, James  
|           | Merrill, Albert A.  
|           | Moisant International Aviators  
|           | Mullins (W. H.) Co.  
| BOX 21    | National Seamless Boat Co.  
|           | Naval airplanes  
|           | Architecture  
|           | Aviation  
|           | Appropriations  
|           | Course instruction  
|           | Institute  
|           | License applications  
|           | (1 folder)  
| BOX 22    | 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 23    | 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.  

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<table>
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<th>Contents</th>
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| BOX 24    | Submarines  
            “T” miscellaneous  
            Thomas Brothers Aeroplane Co.  
            Towers, John H.  
            Transatlantic flights  
            Transportation orders  
| 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 Convertor, undated  
            Curtiss Aeroplane Co., 1912-1913  
            Dirigibles. 1911-1914  
            Foreign navies, 1887-1910 |
| BOX 29    | Harriman, J. Emery, 1911-1912  
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| BOX 36    | United States Navy, 1884-1897  
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| BOX 37    | Burgess Co.  
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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  
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| 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  
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| BOX 40    | Wright Co.  
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Aircraft Logbooks, 1911-1917

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.

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

BOX 42
Notebooks
  1872-1876
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Journals
  Nicaraguan Survey Expedition, 1884-1885
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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.

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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