

William J. Wilgus Papers
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Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2023

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Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Manuscript Division staff, 2022

Collection Summary

Title: William J. Wilgus Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1856-1944

Bulk Dates: 1907-1926

ID No.: MSS86514

Creator: Wilgus, William J., 1865-1949

Extent: 30,000 items

Extent: 114 containers

Extent: 44.8 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2022086514>

Summary: Civil engineer. Correspondence, reports, financial documents, printed matter, blueprints, drawings, and maps documenting Wilgus's career as a railroad engineer and consultant in the United States Northeast and Midwest.

Acquisition Information

The papers of William J. Wilgus were given to the Library of Congress by the Linda Hall Library in 1995. The papers were transferred to the Manuscript Division in 2022.

Custodial History

A portion of the William J. Wilgus Papers were originally given to the Engineering Societies Library in New York City in approximately 1936 or 1937. In 1995 the Engineering Societies Library transferred its holdings to the Linda Hall Library, Kansas City, Missouri. The Linda Hall Library gave the special collections items, which included the Wilgus Papers, to the Library of Congress in 1995.

Processing History

The papers of William J. Wilgus were arranged and described by Joanne Archer and Miles Lawlor with the assistance of Sara Ludewig in 2022. The papers were arranged as received by project with oversize material left in place. Final reports found separated from the project files were integrated at the end of the appropriate project. Material unassociated with an existing project is filed at the end of the collection.

Transfers

Serial publications related to railroad economics have been transferred to the Serial and Government Publications Division. Patrons are encouraged to contact the Serial and Government Publications Division in advance of a research visit.

Other Repositories

The New York Public Library (NYPL) holds a portion of Wilgus's papers related to his work with the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company, his service during World War I, and his private consulting practice. The material at the NYPL from Wilgus's consulting practice primarily document projects in the New York City metropolitan area.

Related Material

Related material at the Library of Congress includes the Engineering Societies Library Collection in Prints and Photographs (see <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2009632513/>) and the Engineering Societies Library biographical and lecture files in the Manuscript Division (see <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms007017>).

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of William J. Wilgus is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of William J. Wilgus are open to research. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, William J. Wilgus Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

| Date | Event |
|---------------|---|
| 1865, Nov. 20 | Born Buffalo, N.Y. |
| 1880 | Employed by Marsden Davey, civil engineer and surveyor, Buffalo, N.Y. |
| 1883-1885 | Completed engineering and drafting correspondence course, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. |
| 1885-1893 | Employed by various railway firms including Minneapolis and Northwestern Railroad, Duluth and Winnipeg Railway Company, and Chicago Union Transfer Railroad in a variety of engineering positions. |
| 1892, Mar. 1 | Married May Reed (1864-1918) |
| 1893 | Assistant engineer, Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg Railroad Company |
| 1897-1907 | Engineer (eastern division), chief assistant engineer, chief of maintenance of right-of-way, chief engineer, New York Central Railroad; supervised construction of Grand Central Station |
| 1906-1910 | Chief advisory engineer for Detroit River Tunnel project, Michigan Central Railroad Company; developed method of "dry tunneling" for which the Institute of Civil Engineers of Great Britain awarded him the Telford gold medal |
| 1907 | Resigned from New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company and started his own consulting business |
| 1917-1918 | Director of railways and deputy director general of transportation, Allied Expeditionary Forces |
| 1920 | Married Gertrude Tobin (1873-1959) |
| 1920-1921 | President, American Society of Civil Engineers, Metropolitan Section |
| 1919-1927 | Member, Board of Consulting Engineers, New York and New Jersey Bridge and Tunnel Commission |
| 1934-1935 | Appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as director, Emergency Relief Bureau, New York City, N.Y. |
| 1949, Oct. 24 | Died, Weathersfield, Vt. |

Scope and Content Note

The papers of William J. Wilgus contain the records of his professional activities as a civil engineer from approximately 1856 through 1944 with the bulk of the material dating from 1907 to 1926. The papers document the work and activities of a railroad engineer in the first decades of the twentieth century. The focus of the papers is on Wilgus's late career in private practice from 1907 through his retirement in 1930. The papers are in English. The collection is organized by the project name and number assigned by Wilgus.

Most of Wilgus's private practice records document his consulting work outside of New York City, primarily in the northeastern United States and the upper Midwest. Wilgus was hired by many railroad corporations to assist in the creation of valuation reports. These reports required the gathering of historical financial data, the listing and description of railroad property, creation of maps, drawings and blueprints of bridges and structures, and the taking of photographs. With the exception of photographs, Wilgus's papers include the final reports, draft reports and the extensive data that supports the valuation for his clients. The Ulster & Delaware Railroad, the Lehigh Valley Railroad and the Detroit River Tunnel are particularly well represented in the collection.

Arrangement of the Collection

This collection is arranged by the project numbers assigned by Wilgus with the original order retained within each project.

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

Wilgus, William J. (William John), 1865-1949.

Organizations

Detroit River Tunnel Company.
Lehigh Valley Railroad Company.
Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad.
Ulster & Delaware Railroad.

Subjects

Civil engineering--United States.
Coal--Storage.
Coal--Transportation.
Railroad bridges--Design and construction.
Railroad companies--United States.
Railroad engineering--United States.
Railroad tunnels--Design and construction.
Railroads--Middle West.
Railroads--Northeastern states.
Railroads--Ontario--Windsor.
Railroads--United States.
Railroads--Valuation.

Titles

Engineering Societies Library Collection (Library of Congress)

Occupations

Engineers.
Railroad consultants.

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