William J. McAlpine Letterbooks
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2023

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

Catalog Record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2022086540

Additional search options available at: https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms023001

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff
Finding aid encoded by Manuscript Division staff, 2023
Revised 2023 May
Collection Summary
Title: William J. McAlpine Letterbooks
Inclusive Dates: 1837-1861
ID No.: MSS86540
Creator: McAlpine, William J. (William Jarvis)
Extent: 6 items
Extent: 6 containers
Extent: 1.2 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English.
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2022086540
Summary: Civil engineer. Letterbooks of handwritten correspondence and reports documenting McAlpine's work as chief engineer or consulting engineer on a variety of bridge, aqueduct, dry dock, and canal projects, primarily in New York State and Chicago, Illinois.

Acquisition Information
The letterbooks of William J. McAlpine were given to the Library of Congress by the Linda Hall Library in 1995 as part of the William J. Wilgus Papers. The papers were transferred to the Manuscript Division in 2022. The McAlpine letterbooks were separated from the Wilgus Papers as a discrete collection in 2022.

Processing History
The letterbooks of William J. McAlpine were arranged and described by Miles Lawlor in 2023.

Other Repositories
A separate copy of McAlpine's letterbook on the Harlem River Bridge, described as the Engineers Private Journal on Harlem Bridge, is held by the Department of Special Collections at the Lehigh University Libraries. This journal has been digitized as part of the University of Pennsylvania Library's OPENN project and is available at: https://openn.library.upenn.edu/Data/0007/html/SCMS0142.html.

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The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of William J. McAlpine is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access Restrictions
The letterbooks of William J. McAlpine 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. McAlpine Letterbooks, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1812, Apr. 30</td>
<td>Born, New York City, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827-1836</td>
<td>Studied of civil engineering under John B. Jervis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830-1831</td>
<td>Assistant engineer, Mohawk and Hudson Rail Road Co. and Albany and Schenectady Rail Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Assistant engineer, St. Lawrence Improvement Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838-1846</td>
<td>Resident engineer, Eastern Division of New York State Canals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846-1849</td>
<td>Chief engineer of dry docks, Brooklyn Navy Yard (New York Naval Shipyard), N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1851</td>
<td>Design work, Albany Water Works, Albany, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1857</td>
<td>Commissioner, New York State Railroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851-1853</td>
<td>Appointed New York State engineer and surveyor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851-1854</td>
<td>Design work, Chicago Water Works, Chicago, Ill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856-1858</td>
<td>Chief engineer and assistant president, Erie Railroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Chief engineer and vice president, Galena and Chicago Railroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-1861</td>
<td>Chief engineer, Harlem River Third Avenue Bridge (Washington Bridge), New York, N.Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868-1869</td>
<td>President, American Society of Civil Engineers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890, Feb. 16</td>
<td>Died, Staten Island, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
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Scope and Content Note

The six bound volumes of the William J. McAlpine Letterbooks consist of handwritten transcripts of material related to civil engineering projects on which McAlpine served as chief engineer or as a consulting engineer. They appear to have served as journals documenting the day-to-day work involved in complex civil engineering projects in the mid-nineteenth century. Materials in this collection focus on McAlpine's work on bridge, aqueduct, dry dock, and canal projects, primarily in New York State and Chicago, III and include such projects as the Albany Water Works, Brooklyn Dry Dock, and the Harlem River Third Avenue Bridge, also known as Washington Bridge. The letterbooks include handwritten copies of correspondence, interim and final project reports, memoranda, construction diagrams, measurements and data sets, and expense tabulations.

Arrangement of the Collection

This collection is arranged chronologically.

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
McAlpine, William J. (William Jarvis)

Organizations
Albany (N.Y.). Water Works.
Chicago (Ill.). Water Works.
New York Naval Shipyard.

Subjects
Aqueducts--Design and construction.
Aqueducts--New York (State)--New York.
Bridges--Design and construction.
Bridges--New York (State)--New York.
Canals--Design and construction.
Canals--New York (State)
Civil engineering--Illinois--Chicago.
Civil engineering--New York (State)
Dry docks--Design and construction.
Dry docks--New York (State)--New York.
Water-supply--Illinois--Chicago.
Water-supply--New York (State)
Waterworks--Design and construction.
Waterworks--Illinois--Chicago.
Waterworks--New York (State)--Albany.
Waterworks--New York (State)--New York.

Places
Croton Aqueduct (N.Y.)
Erie Canal (N.Y.)
Washington Bridge (New York, N.Y.)

Titles
*William J. McAlpine papers*

Occupations
Engineers.
## Container List

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<tr>
<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>Brooklyn dry docks, 1844-1849</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 3</td>
<td>New York Naval Navy Yard, 1846-1849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 4</td>
<td>Water supply for Albany, N.Y. (Albany Water Works), 1851-1852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 5</td>
<td>Manuscript reports on Croton Aqueduct, U.S. dry docks at New York Naval Shipyard and Erie Canal, 1852-1853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 6</td>
<td>Washington Bridge, 1860-1861</td>
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