

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The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of William J. McAlpine is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).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

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

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, Ill 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.

Brooklyn (New York, 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

Container	Contents
BOX 1	Brooklyn Water Works and Chicago Water Works, 1837-1852
BOX 2	Brooklyn dry docks, 1844-1849
BOX 3	New York Naval Navy Yard, 1846-1849
BOX 4	Water supply for Albany, N.Y. (Albany Water Works), 1851-1852
BOX 5	Manuscript reports on Croton Aqueduct, U.S. dry docks at New York Naval Shipyard and Erie Canal, 1852-1853
BOX 6	Washington Bridge, 1860-1861