

Octave Chanute Papers

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<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms998005>

LC Online Catalog record:

<http://lccn.loc.gov/mm78015560>

Prepared by Richard L. McCormack and Allan Teichroew

Revised and expanded by Karen Linn Femia

Collection Summary

Title: Octave Chanute Papers

Span Dates: 1807-1955

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1860-1910)

ID No.: MSS15560

Creator: Chanute, Octave, 1832-1910

Extent: 10,325 items ; 46 containers plus 1 oversize ; 17.4 linear feet ; 25 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

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

Summary: Civil engineer and aviation pioneer. The bulk of the collection relates to Chanute's experiments with gliders and his scientific and financial support of aeronautical pioneers. Other papers concern his career as a builder of railroads and his service as chief engineer of the Erie Railroad and railroads in Illinois and Kansas.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People

Ader, Clément, 1841-1925--Correspondence.

Avery, William A.--Correspondence.

Bell, Alexander Graham, 1847-1922--Correspondence.

Cabot, Samuel, 1850-1906--Correspondence.

Chanute, Octave, 1832-1910.

Hargrave, Lawrence, 1850-1916--Correspondence.

Herring, Augustus Moore, 1867-1926--Correspondence.

Huffaker, Edward C.--Correspondence.

Kress, Wilhelm, 1836-1913--Correspondence.

Langley, S. P. (Samuel Pierpont), 1834-1906--Correspondence.

Lilienthal, Otto, 1848-1896--Correspondence.

Maxim, Hiram S. (Hiram Stevens), 1840-1916--Correspondence.

Moedebeck, Hermann W. L. (Hermann Wilhelm Ludwig), 1857-1910--Correspondence.

Montgomery, John J. (John Joseph), 1858-1911--Correspondence.

Mouillard, Louis-Pierre, 1834-1897--Correspondence.

Moy, Thomas--Correspondence.

Niehaus, Earl F. Earl F. Niehaus thesis. 1955.

Pilcher, Percy--Correspondence.

Spratt, G. A. (George Alexander), 1880-1934--Correspondence.

Wright, Orville, 1871-1948--Correspondence.

Wright, Wilbur, 1867-1912--Correspondence.

Zahm, Albert Francis, 1862--Correspondence.

Organizations

Erie Railroad Company.

Jefferson College (Convent, La.)

Subjects

Aerodynamics.

Aeronautics.

Bridges--Design and construction.

Bridges--Missouri River.

Gliders (Aeronautics)

Kites.

Railroad engineering.

Railroad ties.
Railroads, Elevated--New York (State)--New York.
Railroads--Design and construction.
Railroads--Illinois--Chicago.
Railroads--Kansas--Abilene.
Stockyards--Illinois--Chicago.

Occupations

Aviators.
Civil engineers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Octave Chanute, civil engineer and aviation pioneer, were deposited in the Library of Congress in 1932 and converted to a gift by Elizabeth and Octavia Chanute in 1950. The collection, originally in the custody of the Science Division, was transferred to the Manuscript Division in the 1950s. Small additions were made to the collection by gift and purchase between 1957 and 1997.

Processing History

The papers of Octave Chanute were arranged and described in 1962. Materials received between 1957 and 1997 were processed as additions in 1981 and 1997.

Related Material

Additional correspondence between Chanute and the Wright brothers can be found in the Manuscript Division's collection of their papers. The [Wright Brothers' papers](#) also contain correspondence with George Spratt, who, by way of Chanute, helped the Wrights at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Octave Chanute in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public, except that the literary rights are reserved in the case of "such family correspondence as may allude to purely personal and of no historical and scientific interest." Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division for further information.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Octave Chanute 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.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of the letterbook series is available on twenty-four reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

Online Content

Selected items from the papers of Octave Chanute are available on the Library of Congress Web site at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wrighthtml/>.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Octave Chanute Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1832, Feb. 18	Born, Paris, France
1838	Immigrated with parents to the United States
1849	Began training as a railroad civil engineer
1853-1863	Civil engineer, various Western railroads
1857	Married Annie James
1863-1867	Chief engineer, Chicago & Alton Railroad
1867-1868	Planned and superintended construction of the first bridge across the Missouri River
1867-1873	Chief engineer of several railroads in Kansas
1873-1883	Chief engineer, Erie Railroad; consultant on construction of iron railroad bridges
1889	Began study of aerodynamic theory
1893	President, Chicago Tie Preserving Co.
1894	Published <i>Progress in Flying Machines</i> (New York: <i>The American Engineer and Railroad Journal</i> . 308 pp.)
1896-1897	Experimented with gliders and designed biplane glider of exceptional stability
1901	Visited camp of Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk, N.C., to observe and assist in glider experiments
1910, Nov. 23	Died, Chicago, Ill.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Octave Chanute (1832-1910) span the years 1807-1965, with the vast bulk of the material dating from 1860 to 1910. Chanute spent most of his civil engineering career working on railroad construction. He turned his energies to aeronautical engineering and glider development relatively late in life. Although these papers are principally concerned with the latter part of Chanute's career, there is some material from his career as a builder of railroads, the Chicago stockyards, and a railroad bridge across the Missouri River as well as his contribution to the technique of preserving wooden railroad ties.

The collection centers largely on the period 1890 to 1910 when Chanute was actively involved in glider experiments. At this time, he corresponded with many of the other important pioneers in the development of the airplane. Chanute advised and helped to finance aeronautical experimenters and served as a conduit of information among them. His *Progress in Flying Machines*, published in 1894, was the first authoritative account of aviation history and established Chanute as an international authority on the history and theory of aeronautics.

The collection consists of correspondence, family papers, articles, patents, photographs, sketches, kite diagrams, plans for Chanute's railroad bridge across the Missouri River, and clippings. [Addition I](#) includes a microfilmed thesis on Jefferson College by Earl F. Niehaus. Chanute's father was vice president of the school beginning in 1838.

There are extensive files of correspondence with Louis-Pierre Mouillard, a French pioneer of glider theory, George A. Spratt, whom Chanute served as mentor for various aeronautical experiments and the development of wing pressure testing equipment (found primarily in [Addition II](#)), and with Wilbur and Orville Wright. Some of Chanute's other notable correspondents include Clément Ader, William A. Avery, Baden Fletcher Smyth Baden-Powell, Alexander Graham Bell, Samuel Cabot, Lawrence Hargrave, Augustus Moore Herring, Edward C. Huffaker, Wilhelm Kress, Samuel P. Langley, Otto Lilienthal, Hiram S. Maxim, Hermann W. L. Moedebeck, John J. Montgomery, Thomas Moy, Percy Pilcher, and Albert Francis Zahm.

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in nine series:

- [General Correspondence, 1890-1910](#)
- [Special Correspondence, 1890-1910](#)
- [Aeronautical Papers, 1875-1912](#)
- [Subject File, 1865-1928](#)
- [Letterbooks, 1860-1910](#)
- [Transcripts of Aeronautical Papers](#)
- [Personal Correspondence, 1850-1924](#)
- [Additions, 1807-1965](#)
- [Oversize, 1865-circa 1928](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-3	<u>General Correspondence, 1890-1910</u> Copies of letters sent and received. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent.
BOX 4-6	<u>Special Correspondence, 1890-1910</u> Correspondence, legal papers, patents, and articles. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and chronologically and by type of material therein.
BOX 7-16	<u>Aeronautical Papers, 1875-1912</u> Manuscripts, notes, pamphlets, patents and related letters, clippings, photographs, and sketches. Arranged by type of material and chronologically therein.
BOX 17-18	<u>Subject File, 1865-1928</u> Business and engineering pamphlets and articles, construction plans and brochures of Missouri River Bridge, clippings, patents and related letters, biographical material, photographs and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 19-27 REEL 1-24	<u>Letterbooks, 1860-1910</u> Copies of letters sent, with an index in the front of each volume. Volumes for 1874-1881 are missing. Arranged chronologically. Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 16,482
BOX 28-42	<u>Transcripts of Aeronautical Papers.</u>
BOX 28-33	<u>Alphabetical File, 1890-1910</u> Transcriptions of correspondence in Containers 1-6. Arranged alphabetically.
BOX 34-38	<u>Chronological File, 1855-1910</u> Transcription of the letterbooks and related letters received. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 39-42	<u>Special Correspondence, 1890-1910</u> Correspondence with Augustus Moore Herring, Edward C. Huffaker, C. F. Marvin, Louis-Pierre Mouillard, G. A. Spratt, Wilbur Wright, and Albert Francis Zahm Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and chronologically therein.
BOX 43	<u>Personal Correspondence, 1850-1924</u> Photocopies of personal and family letters sent and received. Arranged chronologically.

BOX 44-46

Additions, 1807-1965

BOX 44

Addition I, 1832-1965

Family papers consisting of biographical data on the Chanute family, correspondence, and genealogical material, and a microfilm copy of a thesis by Earl F. Niehaus.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material and name of family member.

BOX 45-46

Addition II, 1807-1911

Papers of G. A. Spratt consisting mostly of correspondence with Chanute. Also includes blueprints, writings, and a photograph.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.

BOX OV 1

Oversize, 1865-circa 1928

Brochures and plans for Missouri River bridge, blueprint and cutout letter enclosures, and miscellaneous material.
Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-3	General Correspondence, 1890-1910 Copies of letters sent and received. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent.
BOX 1	A-He
BOX 2	Ho-Mea
BOX 3	Mer-Z
BOX 4-6	Special Correspondence, 1890-1910 Correspondence, legal papers, patents, and articles. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and chronologically and by type of material therein.
BOX 4	Mouillard, Louis-Pierre, including legal papers, patents, articles, and partial translation of <i>Le Vol Sans Battements</i>
BOX 5	Wright, Wilbur and Orville Items available online.
BOX 6	Miscellaneous
BOX 7-16	Aeronautical Papers, 1875-1912 Manuscripts, notes, pamphlets, patents and related letters, clippings, photographs, and sketches. Arranged by type of material and chronologically therein.
BOX 7	Articles and patents before 1900
BOX 8	Photographs, sketches, clippings, and papers relating to William Paul Butson, J.J. Bennett, Charles W. Hastings, and Wilhelm Kress prior to 1900
BOX 9	1889-1899
BOX 10	1900-1902
BOX 11	1903-1905
BOX 12	1906-1907
BOX 13	1908-1909
BOX 14	1910
BOX 15	1911
BOX 16	Photograph album, scrapbook, and clippings concerning kites
BOX 17-18	Subject File, 1865-1928 Business and engineering pamphlets and articles, construction plans and brochures of Missouri River Bridge, clippings, patents and related letters, biographical material, photographs and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 17	Biographical material

Subject File, 1865-1928

Container

Contents

	Business and engineering articles (2 folders)
BOX 18	(1 folder)
	Clippings
	List of principal writings
	Miscellany <i>See also Oversize</i>
	Missouri River bridge
	Brochures describing Missouri River bridge, St. Charles, Mo. <i>See Oversize</i>
	Miscellaneous notes and letters
	Plans of construction, Missouri River bridge, St. Charles, Mo. <i>See Oversize</i>
	Patents
	Photographic portraits
BOX 19-27	Letterbooks, 1860-1910
REEL 1-24	
	Copies of letters sent, with an index in the front of each volume. Volumes for 1874-1881 are missing.
	Arranged chronologically.
	Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 16,482
BOX 19	5 Sept. 1860-3 June 1863
REEL 1	
BOX 19	31 Dec. 1864-21 Nov. 1866
REEL 2	
	22 Nov. 1866-3 June 1869
BOX 19	17 June 1869-28 Sept. 1873
REEL 3	
BOX 20	1 Jan. 1871-15 Oct. 1873
REEL 4	
BOX 20	16 Mar. 1882-14 Aug. 1883, 31 Jan. 1885
REEL 5	
BOX 20	14 July 1883-15 Apr. 1885
REEL 6	
BOX 21	15 Apr. 1885-15 Aug. 1887
REEL 7	
BOX 21	16 Aug. 1887-18 Apr. 1890
REEL 8	
BOX 22	24 Apr. 1890-15 Apr. 1891
REEL 9	
BOX 22	21 Apr. 1890-17 May 1892
REEL 10	
BOX 22	18 May 1892-11 Sept. 1893
REEL 11	
BOX 23	13 Sept. 1893-12 Oct. 1894
REEL 12	
BOX 23	15 Oct. 1894-1 Feb. 1896
REEL 13	
BOX 24	1 Feb.-23 Nov. 1896
REEL 14	

Letterbooks, 1860-1910

Container

Contents

BOX 24	23 Nov. 1896-22 Apr. 1898
REEL 15	
BOX 24	25 Apr. 1898-7 June 1899
REEL 16	
BOX 25	10 June 1899-28 Sept. 1900
REEL 17	
BOX 25	29 Sept. 1900-7 Jan. 1902
REEL 18	
BOX 25	8 Jan. 1902-23 Sept. 1903
REEL 19	
BOX 26	24 Sept. 1903-24 Jan. 1905
REEL 20	
BOX 26	31 Jan. 1905-11 Aug. 1906
REEL 21	
BOX 27	12 Aug. 1906-20 Jan. 1908
REEL 22	
BOX 27	20 Jan. 1908-29 July 1909
REEL 23	
BOX 27	30 July 1909-14 May 1910
REEL 24	
BOX 28-42	Transcripts of Aeronautical Papers.
BOX 28-33	Alphabetical File, 1890-1910 Transcriptions of correspondence in Containers 1-6. Arranged alphabetically.
BOX 28	Ae-He
BOX 29	Ho-Mo
BOX 30	Mo-Wa
BOX 31	We-Wr
BOX 32	Forney, M. N., correspondence Wright, Wilbur and Orville, correspondence Miscellaneous letters (1 volume)
BOX 33	(2 volumes)
BOX 34-38	Chronological File, 1855-1910 Transcription of the letterbooks and related letters received. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 34	1885-1894
BOX 35	1895-1897
BOX 36	1898-1902
BOX 37	1903-1906
BOX 38	1907-1910

Transcripts of Aeronautical Papers.

Container

Contents

- BOX 39-42** **Special Correspondence, 1890-1910**
Correspondence with Augustus Moore Herring, Edward C. Huffaker, C. F. Marvin, Louis-
Pierre Mouillard, G. A. Spratt, Wilbur Wright, and Albert Francis Zahm
Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and chronologically therein.
- BOX 39** Correspondence with Augustus Moore Herring, Edward C. Huffaker, C. F. Marvin, G. A.
Spratt, Albert Francis Zahm
1900-1903
- BOX 40** 1904-1910
- BOX 41** Mouillard, Louis-Pierre
English translations, 1890-1897
- BOX 42** French transcripts, 1890-1897
(3 folders)
Wright, Wilbur
From Chanute, 1900-1904
To Chanute, 1900-1910
(4 folders)
- BOX 43** **Personal Correspondence, 1850-1924**
Photocopies of personal and family letters sent and received.
Arranged chronologically.
- BOX 43** Photocopies of personal and family letters
- BOX 44-46** **Additions, 1807-1965**
- BOX 44** **Addition I, 1832-1965**
Family papers consisting of biographical data on the Chanute family, correspondence, and
genealogical material, and a microfilm copy of a thesis by Earl F. Niehaus.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material and name of family member.
- BOX 44** Family papers
Boyd, Alice Chanute, 1912-1925, undated
Chanute, Annie Octavia, 1871-1924
Chanute, Elizabeth, 1889-1960, undated
Chanute, Elizabeth and Octavia, 1911-1947
(2 folders)
Chanute, Gertrude DeBonairo, 1863
Chanute, Joseph, 1964-1965, undated
Chanute, Octave, 1832-1910, undated
(2 folders)
Niehaus, Earl F., "Jefferson College in St. James Parish, Louisiana: 1830-1875," microfilm
copy of thesis on Chanute, 1955
Microfilm shelf number 17,096. Not available on interlibrary loan.
- BOX 45-46** **Addition II, 1807-1911**
Papers of G. A. Spratt consisting mostly of correspondence with Chanute. Also includes
blueprints, writings, and a photograph.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.

Additions, 1807-1965

Container

Contents

BOX 45	Spratt, G. A. Blueprints and photograph, 1898, undated Correspondence with Chanute <i>See also Oversize</i> 1898-1908 (13 folders)
BOX 46	1909-1911 (3 folders) Printed matter, 1904-1910 Writings Chanute, Octave, 1907-1908, undated Miscellaneous, 1807, undated Spratt, G. A., undated
BOX OV 1	Oversize, 1865-circa 1928 Brochures and plans for Missouri River bridge, blueprint and cutout letter enclosures, and miscellaneous material. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Subject File Miscellany, circa 1870-circa 1928 (Container 18) Missouri River Bridge Brochures describing Missouri River bridge, St. Charles, Mo., 1865 (Container 18) Plans of construction, Missouri River bridge, St. Charles, Mo., undated (Container 18) Additions Addition II Spratt, G. A. Correspondence from Chanute Enclosure: blueprint and cutouts of wing shapes, 29 June 1900 (Container 45)