

William Sowden Sims Papers

A Finding Aid to the Papers in the Naval
Historical Foundation Collection in the
Library of Congress

Prepared by Anita Nolen, Beverly Brannan,
and Ruth S. Nicholson



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2011

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Collection Summary

Title: William Sowden Sims Papers

Span Dates: 1856-1951

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1900-1936)

ID No.: MSS53645

Creator: Sims, William Sowden, 1858-1939

Extent: 43,000 items; 153 containers plus 1 oversize; 61.8 linear feet; 45 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

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

Abstract: Naval officer. Correspondence, memoranda, writings, notes, reports, military orders, biographical material, clippings, and other papers primarily documenting Sims's naval career and his work relating to naval reforms.

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

Arnold, W. F. (Will Ford)--Correspondence.
Babcock, John V. (John Vincent)--Correspondence.
Bayly, Lewis, Sir, 1857-1938--Correspondence.
Benson, William Shepherd, 1855-1932--Correspondence.
Daniels, Josephus, 1862-1948--Correspondence.
Edwards, W. Atlee--Correspondence.
Fiske, Bradley A. (Bradley Allen), 1854-1942--Correspondence.
Fullam, William F. (William Freeland), 1855-1926--Correspondence.
Hoover, Herbert, 1874-1964--Correspondence.
Kittredge, Tracy B., b. 1891--Correspondence.
Mahan, A. T. (Alfred Thayer), 1840-1914--Correspondence.
McLean, Ridley, 1872-1933--Correspondence.
Pratt, William Veazie, 1869-1957--Correspondence.
Pringle, Joel Roberts Poinsett, 1873-1932--Correspondence.
Reuter Dahl, Henry, 1871-1925--Correspondence.
Roberts, Kenneth Lewis, 1885-1957--Correspondence.
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945--Correspondence.
Roosevelt, Theodore, 1858-1919--Correspondence.
Simms family--Correspondence.
Sims, Anne Hitchcock, 1875-1960. Anne Hitchcock Sims papers.
Sims, William Sowden, 1858-1936.

Organizations

Charleston (Cruiser)
United States. Navy Dept. Bureau of Navigation.
United States. Navy--Foreign service--China.
United States. Navy--Intelligence specialists.
United States. Navy.
United States. Navy. China Station.
United States. Navy.--Operational readiness.

Subjects

Military attachés--France--Paris.
Military attachés--Russia--Saint Petersburg.

Military attachés--Spain--Madrid.
Naval gunnery.
World War, 1914-1918--Europe.
World War, 1914-1918--Naval operations, American.

Occupations
Naval officers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of William Sowden Sims, naval officer, were deposited in the Library of Congress by the Naval Historical Foundation in 1961, 1970, and 1972, and converted to a gift in 1998.

Processing History

The Sims Papers were processed in 1971 and revised and expanded in 1972. The finding aid was revised in 2011.

Additional Guides

In 1971, the Library published *William Sowden Sims, a Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress*.

Transfers

Sound recordings have been transferred to the Library's Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division where they are identified as part of these papers.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of William Sowden Sims 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 Special Correspondence series in these papers is available on forty-five negative reels. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, William Sowden Sims Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1858, Oct. 15	Born, Port Hope, Ontario, Canada

1880	Graduated., United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1895-1896	Intelligence officer, <i>Charleston</i> on the China Station
1896-1900	Naval attaché, Paris, France; Madrid, Spain; and St. Petersburg, Russia
1900-1902	Duty in the <i>Kentucky</i> , <i>Monterey</i> , and <i>Brooklyn</i> on the China Station and on the staff of commander in chief, Asiatic Fleet
1902-1909	Inspector of target practice, Bureau of Navigation
1905	Married Anne Hitchcock
1909-1911	Commanded <i>Minnesota</i>
1911-1913	Student and instructor, United States Naval War College, Newport, R.I.
1913-1915	Commanded Torpedo Flotilla, Atlantic Fleet
1915-1917	Commanded <i>Nevada</i>
1917	Promoted to rear admiral President, United States Naval War College Commandant, Second Naval District Sent on secret advisory mission to Europe
1917-1919	Commanded U.S. naval forces in European theater
1919-1922	President, United States Naval War College
1920	Published with Burton J. Hendrick <i>The Victory at Sea</i> . Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday
1922	Retired from U.S. Navy
1934	Published "Promotion by Selection," in <i>Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute</i> , 60 (June 1934)
1935	Published <i>Promotion by Selection in the Navy</i> . Boston: Mass.
1936, Sept. 26	Died, Boston, Mass.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of William Sowden Sims (1858-1936) span the period 1856-1951, but bulk largest between 1900-1936. The collection consists of correspondence, memoranda, reports, manuscripts, notes, clippings, printed matter, and miscellaneous material arranged in seven series largely as received: [Correspondence](#); [Subject File](#), [Speech, Article, and Book file](#); [Miscellany](#); [Clippings and Printed Matter](#), [Addition](#), and [Oversize](#).

The papers document Sims's career as a naval officer who played a significant role in initiating naval reforms during the early years of the twentieth century and World War I. A subseries of [Personal Correspondence](#) documents Sims's career at sea; his strong attachment to his family prompted numerous letters to his parents and, after his marriage in 1905, to his wife. These letters are rich in the details of his life aboard ship at the China Station, as naval attaché at Paris, Madrid, and St. Petersburg, and as commander of naval forces in Europe during World War I.

Sims's concern with reforms in the navy, particularly with gunnery and firing efficiency aboard ship, is manifested in a subseries of [Special Correspondence](#) and in the [Subject File](#). The [Special Correspondence](#) was kept as a separate entity to reflect the organization of Sims's files and includes subjects such as gunnery, preparedness, and the Bureau of Navigation as well correspondence with individuals. Material concerning target practice, naval reform and the organization of the navy is in the [Subject File](#). Documentation on these topics and Sims's correspondence with President Theodore Roosevelt, also in the Subject File series, describe his experiences as inspector of target practice and naval aide to the president.

During World War I Sims was detached as president of the Naval War College and sent abroad on confidential missions. He later served as commander of United States naval forces operations in the European theater. Much of his correspondence with other naval officers was carried on during the period he was in England. Among these correspondents are Sir Lewis Bayly, William Shepherd Benson, Josephus Daniels, Bradley A. Fiske, William F. Fullam, Herbert Hoover, A. T. Mahan, Ridley McLean, William Veazie Pratt, Joel Roberts Poinsett Pringle, Henry Reuter Dahl, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Prominent in the [Speech, Article, and Book File](#) is material gathered by Sims for *Promotion by Selection*, an article published in 1934. Included are letters he solicited voicing reactions to the article. Sims summarized these reactions in the pamphlet *Promotion by Selection in the Navy*.

The [Miscellany](#) series includes a typescript of an unpublished biography of Sims by Tracy B. Kittredge, and Sims's orders to duty dating from 1876 when he was appointed to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis.

The [Addition](#) to the collection spans the years 1884-1951, but relates chiefly to 1917-1936. The material represents primarily the later years of Sims's naval career, although it does include his military orders from 1884 to 1925 and some personal correspondence back to 1910. Correspondence, subject files, and social calendars of his wife, Anne Hitchcock Sims, are also in the Addition. There is correspondence with his biographer, Tracy B. Kittredge, and Kenneth Lewis Roberts, who also considered writing a biography of Sims. Personal correspondents include John V. Babcock, W. F. Arnold and W. Atlee Edwards.

Arrangement of the Papers

The collection is arranged in seven series:

- [Correspondence, 1856-1951](#)
- [Subject File, 1897-1940](#)
- [Speech, Article, and Book File, 1910-1935](#)
- [Miscellany, 1876-1936](#)
- [Clippings and Printed Matter, 1891-1937](#)
- [Addition, 1884-1951](#)
- [Oversize](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-91	<u>Correspondence, 1856-1951</u>
BOX 1-11	<u>Personal, 1856-1935</u> Letters sent and received, primarily to and from family members, with a few from close personal friends. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 12-34	<u>General, 1881-1949</u> Letters received and copies of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 35-36	<u>Letters of Condolence, 1936-1937</u> Letters received by the Sims family on the death of William Sowden Sims. Arranged alphabetically.
BOX 37-44	<u>Routine, 1912-1936</u> Letters received and copies of letters sent. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent or type.
BOX 45-91	<u>Special, 1898-1951</u> Letters received, copies of letters sent, memoranda, reports, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by subject or name of correspondent. Also available on microfilm 14,810
BOX 92-108	<u>Subject File, 1897-1940</u> Letters received, copies of letters sent, memoranda, reports, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX 102-108	<u>Speech, Article, and Book File, 1910-1935</u> Manuscript, near-print, and printed copies of speeches and writings of Sims, and correspondence and notes concerning his writings. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 109-113	<u>Miscellany, 1876-1936</u> Orders to duty, mementos, typescript of an unpublished biography of Sims, and miscellaneous unidentified material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 114-141	<u>Clippings and Printed Matter, 1891-1937</u> Newspaper clippings and miscellaneous publications. Arranged chronologically by year, where possible, but otherwise unsorted.
BOX 142-153	<u>Addition, 1884-1951</u> Correspondence, invitations, speeches and articles, photographs, and printed matter.

Arranged by type of material.

BOX OV 1

Oversize

Photographs

Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which they were removed.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-91	Correspondence, 1856-1951
BOX 1-11	Personal, 1856-1935 Letters sent and received, primarily to and from family members, with a few from close personal friends. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1	1856-1887, June
BOX 2	1887, July-1893, Dec.
BOX 3	1894-1896
BOX 4	1897-1907, June
BOX 5	1907, July-1909
BOX 6	1910-1912
BOX 7	1913-1914
BOX 8	1915-1916, Sept.
BOX 9	1916, Oct.-1918, Mar.
BOX 10	1918, Apr.-1919
BOX 11	1920-1935 Undated
BOX 12-34	General, 1881-1949 Letters received and copies of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 12	1881-1902
BOX 13	1903-1904, Mar.
BOX 14	1904, Apr.-1905, June
BOX 15	1905, July-1906
BOX 16	1907
BOX 17	1908, Jan.-Sept.
BOX 18	1908, Oct.-1909, Sept.
BOX 19	1909, Oct.-1910, June
BOX 20	1910, July-Dec.
BOX 21	1911-1914
BOX 22	1915-1917, July
BOX 23	1917, Aug.-1918, June
BOX 24	1918, July-Dec.
BOX 25	1919, Jan.-July
BOX 26	1919, Aug.-1920, Aug.
BOX 27	1920, Sept.-1921, May
BOX 28	1921, June-Dec.
BOX 29	1922

Correspondence, 1856-1951

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 30	1923-1926
BOX 31	1927-June 1932
BOX 32	1932, July-1935, Apr.
BOX 33	1935, May-1949 Undated
BOX 34	Undated Fragments Letterbook, 1899-1902
BOX 35-36	Letters of Condolence, 1936-1937 Letters received by the Sims family on the death of William Sowden Sims. Arranged alphabetically.
BOX 35	"A-M" miscellaneous
BOX 36	"N-Z" miscellaneous Telegrams
BOX 37-44	Routine, 1912-1936 Letters received and copies of letters sent. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent or type.
BOX 37	Aero Club of America, 1918-1921 Algonquin Club, Boston, Mass., 1919-1928 American Veterans Association, 1936 Autograph requests
BOX 38	Chambers of commerce, board of trade, city clubs, civic federations, and forums, 1916-1933 Church and religious societies, 1918-1936
BOX 39	Clubs in Canada and Canadian clubs in United States, 1919-1935 Columbia University, New York, N.Y. Council on Foreign Relations, 1921-1932 Elks, Kiwanis, Lions, and Odd Fellows clubs, 1922-1927 Engineers clubs, 1921-1927 English invitations Miscellaneous, 1917-1921 British Empire Club, 1919-1930 The Kinsmen, 1917-1919 The Pilgrims, 1919-1921 Foreign Policy Association, 1927-1932 Harvard clubs, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1915-1936 Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1919-1931
BOX 40-41	Invitations 1916-1936
BOX 42	Public invitations in United States Lambs Club and Actors' Fund 1919-1921 Masonic clubs, 1920-1930 Memberships, 1921-1935

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

BOX 43	<p>Military and naval organizations, 1919-1935</p> <p>Military Order of Foreign Wars, 1918-1928</p> <p>Military Order of the World War, 1921-1936</p> <p>Northfield, Mass., schools, 1922-1924</p> <p>Retirement, letters received on, 1922</p> <p>Roosevelt Memorial Association, 1919-1936</p> <p>Rotary clubs, 1921-1932</p> <p>Society of the Cincinnati, 1919-1932</p> <p>Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, N.Y., 1921-1932</p>
BOX 44	<p>Union League Club, 1935</p> <p>Universities, colleges, schools, 1923-1936</p> <p>University clubs, 1912-1933</p> <p>YMCAs, 1919-1936</p>
BOX 45-91	<p>Special, 1898-1951</p> <p>Letters received, copies of letters sent, memoranda, reports, and printed matter.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by subject or name of correspondent. Also available on microfilm 14,810</p>
BOX 45	<p>Admiralty</p> <p><i>Aero Digest</i></p> <p>Aircraft investigation, 1925</p> <p>Allen, Gardner W.</p> <p>Allingham, William</p> <p>American Legion</p> <p> 1919-1933</p> <p> Invitations to speak, 1919-1932</p> <p>American Library Association</p> <p>American Luncheon Club</p> <p>American Merchant Marine Library Association</p> <p>American Officers Club, 1918-1919</p>
BOX 46	<p>American Red Cross, 1917-1922</p> <p>American Sailors' Hut Fund</p> <p>American Society in London, 1917-1918</p> <p>Ancrum, William</p> <p>Andrews, Philip, 1906-1935</p> <p>Anit-Saloon League, 1924-1930</p> <p>Appleton (D.) & Co., 1919-1922</p> <p>Appreciation of war service, 1917-1919</p> <p>Armistice, 1918</p> <p>Army and Navy Club, 1919-1921</p> <p><i>Army and Navy Journal, 1906-1930</i></p> <p><i>Army and Navy Life, 1908</i></p> <p><i>Army and Navy Register, 1909-1922</i></p>
BOX 47	<p>The Athenaeum, 1917-1919</p> <p><i>Atlantic Monthly, 1921-1932</i></p>

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Atterbury, W. W.
	Auditor for Navy Department
	Aviation, 1917-1933
	Badger, Charles J.
	Bagley, David W.
	Baker, George Barr
	Baker, Randolph L.
	Baldrige, H. A.
	Baldwin, E. K.
	Balfour, Arthur J.
	Barnard, C. I.
	George Barrie's Sons, 1919-1921
	Bates, Lindon W.
	Bayly, Sir Lewis
BOX 48	1917-1918
	1919-1936
	Beach, Edward L.
	Beal, Boylston
	Beatty, David
	Beaverbrook, Lord, 1918
	Bedford College for Women, London, England, 1918
	Beeckman, R. Livingston, 1919-1922
	Beehler, W. P., 1922
	Belknap, Charles, 1914-1932
	Belknap, Reginald R., 1913-1929
	Bellows, Philip, 1920-1921
	Benedict, Roswell A., 1920
	Benson, William Shepherd
	1909-1916
BOX 49	1917-1919
	Berg, Hart O., 1917
	Berrien, Frank D.
	Bertin, E., 1918-1919
	Biddle, John, 1918-1919
	Bigelow, John, 1922-1930
	Bigelow, Poultney, 1922-1928
	Bingham, Hiram, 1921-1929
	Bloom, Edwin D., 1919
	Blue, Victor, 1913-1919
	Bogert, E. S., 1919-1922
BOX 50	Boston, Mass., newspapers, 1918-1934
	Boston University, Boston, Mass., 1922-1923
	Boxing, 1919-1921
	Bradley, Walter H., 1923-1931
	Bradshaw, G. B., 1906-1914
	Braisted, W. C., 1914-1919

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Breck, Edward, 1919-1922
	Brent, Charles H., 1918-1924
	Bristol, Mark L., 1907-1919
	British and American cooperation
	British & Foreign Sailors' Society, 1917-1920
	British Embassy, 1919-1922
	British naval officers
	British societies, 1919-1923
	Brittain, Harry, 1918-1928
	Brooks-Bryce Foundation, 1925-1930
	Brownrigg, Douglas, 1919-1920
	Brownson, Willard H., 1906-1922
	Bullard, W. H. G., 1918-1920
	Burdick, Clark, 1923-1932
BOX 51	Bureau of Navigation, 1918-1925
	Butler, Thomas S., 1919
	Camacho, Leopold A., 1917-1933
	Campbell, E. H., 1904-1920
	Cannon, James, 1918
	Caperton, W. B., 1914-1919
	Carnegie, William H. and Mary E., 1917-1919
	Carpender, Arthur S., 1917-1920
	Carson, Edward
	Cathcart, William L., 1916-1917
	Chandler, Lloyd H., 1913-1930
	Chapple, Joe Mitchell, 1918-1928
	Chase, Volney O., 1913-1915
	Chatterton, E. Keble, 1922-1934
	Chemical warfare, 1922-1925
	Chicago, Ill., newspapers, 1920-1926
	<i>Christian Science Monitor</i> , 1918-1935
	Churchill, Winston (1871-1947), 1915-1919
	Churchill, Winston (1874-1965), 1917-1918
	Civalleri, P., 1920-1921
	Cluverius, W. T., 1919-1922
	Cobb, Frank I., 1918-1921
	Coffey, R. B., 1913-1918
	Coffman, D. W., 1914-1919
BOX 52	Columbia Graphophone Co., 1918
	Cone, H. I., 1908-1934
	Congratulations on Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George, 1918-1919
	Connolly, James B., 1920
	Constien, Edward T., 1908-1918
	Coontz, Robert E., 1919-1922
	Cornell War Memorial, Ithaca, N.Y., 1927

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Cotten, Lyman A., 1917-1920
	Courtney, C. E., 1914-1918
	Cramer, Ambrose, 1917-1920
	Crane, R. Newton, 1918-1921
	Crank, R. K., 1909-1918
	Cravath, Paul D., 1918-1921
BOX 53	Craven, Francis S., 1918-1935
	Craven, Thomas T., 1912-1920
	Crenshaw, Arthur, 1914-1921
	Cresap, Logan, 1920-1921
	Cronan, W. P., 1913-1921
	Crosley, W. S., 1918
	Cross, Wilson, 1917-1923
	Curtiss, John C., 1918-1920
	Daniels, Joseph F., 1914-1923
	Daniels, Josephus
	1913-1919
BOX 54	1920-1929
	Davis, Cleland, 1913-1917
	Davison, Henry P., 1919-1923
	Dealey, James Q., 1921-1922
	De Bon, Ferdinand, 1918-1922
	Decker, Benton C., 1914-1918
	Defrees, J. R., 1916
	Denby, Edwin, 1921-1923
	Derby, Richard C., 1917-1922
	Destroyers at war and at Queenstown, Ireland, 1917-1919
	Dillingham, A. C., 1903-1923
	Dimnet, Ernest, 1919-1923
	Dinger, H. C., 1913-1925
	Dismukes, Douglas E., 1919-1924
	Doran, George H., 1919-1931
	Douglas, Stopford C., 1918-1920
	Duff, Edward A., 1917-1923
	Dunlap, Robert H., 1919-1921
BOX 55	Dunn, Herbert O., 1912-1932
	Dunning, James E., 1918-1921
	Dutton (E. P.) & Co., 1920-1922
	Dyer, George P., 1918
	Dyer, H. T., 1920-1921
	Earle, Ralph, 1913-1932
	Eaton, W. C., 1919-1920
	Eberle, E. W., 1908-1922
	Edison, Thomas A., Ltd., 1918-1922
	Edwards, Clarence R., 1920-1922
	Elliot, Richard M., 1918

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Emmet, R. R. M., 1914-1928
	<i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i> , 1923-1927
	Engineering-Economics Foundation, 1923-1927
	English Speaking Union, 1918-1936
	English Speaking World, 1919-1923
BOX 56	Enlisted personnel
	1906-1936
	Discipline, 1913-1914
	Officers reports on fitness, 1918-1920
	Testimonials for, 1913-1924
	Evans, Sydney K., 1915-1935
BOX 57	Fairfield, Arthur P., 1915-1933
	Far East
	Fearing, George R., Jr., 1919-1921
	Figueredo, Bernardo, 1915-1923
	Fisher, J. O., 1915-1917
	Fisher, John, 1917-1920
	Fiske, Bradley A., 1904-1933
	Fletcher, F. F., 1914-1915
	Fletcher, W. B., 1919-1920
	Flotilla
	1913-1914
BOX 58	1915-1929
	Foley, Paul, 1911-1921
	Foote, Percy W., 1916-1920
	Forbes, Alexander, 1919-1934
	Forbes family, 1907-1933
	Ford, Henry, 1921-1927
	<i>Foreign Affairs</i> , 1923-1924
	Freeman, C. S., 1914-1916
BOX 59	Friedrick, Ernest, 1918
	Frost, Hollowy H., 1915-1924
	Frothingham, Thomas G., 1919-1924
	Fullman, William F.
	1908-1922
BOX 60	1923-1928
	Gardiner, William Howard, 1919-1931
	Gatewood, R. D., 1914
	Geddes, Eric, 1918-1921
	General Board, 1913-1927
	Gherardi, Walter R., 1916-1918
	Gillis, I. V., 1932
	Gillmor, R. E., 1918-1928
	Gills, W. Armistead, 1925
	Glassford, William, 1916-1919
	Gleaves, Albert, 1909-1922

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

BOX 61	Gleeson, Matthew C., 1904-1918 Goddard, William D., 1919-1924 Golledge, Ernest J., 1917-1919 Goodrich, Caspar F., 1915-1922 Gould, George M, 1905-1931 Grant, H. C. J., 1903-1917 Grant, Mabel, 1917-1919 Grasty, Charles H., 1917-1921 Grayson, R. H., 1922 Green, Fitzhugh, 1925-1926 Gribble, Bernard F., 1917-1921 Griffin, Robert S., 1910-1918 Grolier Society, 1919-1924 Gunn, Sidney, 1919-1924 Gunnery 1898-1914
BOX 62	1915-1932 Hadfield, Robert, 1918-1922 Hale, Frederick, 1920-1921 Halsey, Lionel, 1917-1919 Hamilton, J. W., 1917-1925 Hammond, John Hays, 1915-1930 Hanrahan, David C., 1914-1921 Harding, Warren G., 1920-1932 Harper & Brothers, 1917-1919 Harris, Leverton, 1917-1919 Harrison, William K., 1903-1924 Hartley, Arthur C., 1921-1927 Hasbrouck, Raymond D., 1918-1920 Hearst newspapers, 1922-1933 Hellweg, J. F., 1914-1935
BOX 63	Hendrick, Burton J., 1918-1936 Herbert, Arthur, 1918-1921 Hicks, Frederick C., 1918-1921 Hinds, Arthur W., 1917-1918 Hislam, Percival A., 1917 Holt, Winifred, 1917-1926 Hood, John, 1914 Hoover, Herbert, 1918-1932 Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919-1932 Huse, Harry M. P., 1914-1921 Hussey, Charles L., 1901-1928 Institute of Politics, Williams College, Williamstown, Mass., 1921 Inventions, requests for opinions, 1917-1932 Investigations of 1920 (2 folders)

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

BOX 64	(6 folders) Investigations of 1908 and 1909 and kindred subjects Irish National Bureau, 1919 Isham, Willard S., 1916-1920 "Jackass" speech, 1921 Official documents Letters of approval (3 folders)
BOX 65	(9 folders)
BOX 66	(6 folders)
BOX 67	Miscellaneous correspondence Letters of abuse Clippings Post cards
BOX 68	Jackson, H. B., 1910-1917 Jackson, John P., 1914-1919 Jackson, O. P., 1914-1920 Jackson, R. H., 1917-1919 Janis, Elsie, 1918-1920 Jeffers, W. N., 1914-1916 Jellicoe, John, 1907-1935 Jessop, Earl P., 1914-1920 Johnson, Alfred W., 1914-1931 Johnston, Marbury, 1912-1921 Johnston, Rufus Z., 1917-1927 Jones, F. Hilary, 1918 Jones, Needham Lee, 1913-1914 Jutland, 1916-1933 Kennedy, Moorhead C., 1918-1932 Key, Albert L., 1908-1922 Keyes, Roger, 1918-1919 Keyes, R. S., 1918 Kimberly, Victor A., 1916 King, E. J., 1914-1921 King, Edward L., 1921
BOX 69	Knapp, H. S., 1914-1922 Knight, Austin M., 1913-1920 Knox, Dudley W., 1912-1928 Koehler, Hugo W., 1919-1925 Lammers, Howard, 1921-1923 Land, Emory Scott, 1914-1922 Landenberger, G. B., 1914-1921 Landers, George F., 1919-1921 Laning, Harris, 1905-1931 Laughlin, Irwin, 1917-1927 League of Nations Leake, F. Martin, 1919-1927

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

BOX 70	Legal cases, naval Leigh, Richard H., 1918-1932 Leighton, John L., 1918-1928 Little, Brown & Co., 1931-1934 Littlefield, W. L., 1914-1916 Lloyd George, David, 1919-1923 Lodge, Henry Cabot, 1920-1932 Long, Andrew T., 1918-1921 Long, Byron A., 1915-1921 Lord Mayor of London, London, England, 1918-1919 Lowell, A. Lawrence, 1919-1922 Lowell Lectures, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1919-1930 Lowry, Edward G., 1919-1923 Loyal Coalition, 1920-1923 Lyons, Lieutenant MacAfee, John Blair, 1917-1920 Macfarlane, Peter Clark, 1919 MacNair, James D., 1915-1920
BOX 71	Magazines Magruder, Thomas P., 1921-1927 Mahan, A. T., controversy with, 1908-1918 Mannix, Daniel Pratt, 1914 Mayo, H. T., 1914-1918 McAndrew, James W., 1919-1920 McBride, Lewis B., 1918-1920 <i>McClure's Magazine</i> , 1909-1925 McDonald, William J., 1917-1922 McGowan, Samuel, 1915-1921 McGrann, William H., 1919-1920 McKean, Josiah S., 1912-1919 McLean, N. T., 1932 McLean, Ridley 1905-1912
BOX 72	1916-1925 McMaster, Gilbert Totten, 1920-1921 McNab, Alexander, 1920-1921 McNair, F. V., 1916-1919 McNair, Lawrence N., 1919 McNamee, Luke, 1922-1923 McNeely, R. W., 1913-1921 Meigs, John F., 1918-1924 Merchant marine, 1919-1934 Meriwether, Walter S., 1914-1925 Meyer, George von L., 1912-1919 Mildmay, Francis B., 1921-1935 Miles, A. H., 1917-1920

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Miller, Cyrus R., 1915-1923
	<i>Minnesota</i> , 1909-1932
BOX 73	Mitchell, William, 1921-1935
	Moody Board, 1908-1930
	Morgan, Junius S., Jr., 1919-1930
	Moses, Stanford E., 1914-1932
	Mower, George A., 1918-1932
	Mustin, Henry C., 1912-1923
	Nagel, Charles, 1917-1933
	National Economy League, 1932-1935
	National Security League, 1920-1924
	Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md., 1907-1929
BOX 74	1930-1936
	Naval Academy Graduates Association, 1915-1936
	Naval air force, 1921-1925
	Naval bases-navy yard, 1911-1935
	Naval Consulting Board, 1917-1920
	Naval Institute, 1914-1922
	"Naval Lessons of the Great War," 1921
	Naval officers, 1917
	Naval Order of the United States, 1922-1935
	Naval Reserve, Junior, 1919-1923
	Naval Reserve Officers' Association, 1919-1923
	Naval Training Association, 1916
	Navy Club of New York City, 1918-1925
	Navy League-British, 1917-1919
	Navy League-U.S., 1912-1924
BOX 75	Navy pay, 1919
	Navy Relief Society, 1919
	Nelson, Charles P., 1918-1919
	<i>Nevada</i> , 1915-1936
	<i>New York Evening Post</i> , 1919-1929
	<i>New York Sun</i> , 1916-1930
	<i>New York Times</i> , 1913-1936
	<i>New York Tribune</i> , 1914-1935
	<i>New York World</i> , 1921-1927
	<i>Newport Daily News</i> , 1920-1921
	Newport Herald, 1913-1926
	Newspapers, miscellaneous, 1916-1931
BOX 76	Niblack, Albert P., 1901-1920
	Nichols, Newton L., 1923
	Nulton, Louis M., 1913-1932
	"Nut Dope"
	Ogilvy, T.
	Oliver, James H., 1904-1918

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Oliver, William B., 1916
	Osterhaus, Hugo (Jr. and Sr.), 1909-1930
	<i>Outlook</i> magazine, 1914-1932
	Overstreet, L. M., 1922
	Pacific Mail Steamship Co., 1920-1921
	Page, Arthur W., 1919-1929
	Page, Walter Hiines, 1917-1926
	Page, Walter Hines, memorial, 1924-1932
BOX 77	Paget, Mary, 1917-1919
	Paine, Ralph D., 1917-1924
	Palmer, Leigh C., 1912-1918
	Parker, Gilbert, 1918
	Parker, James, 1921-1927
	Parker, Ralph C., 1920-1924
	Payne, H. T., 1917
	Peace, 1915-1936
	Pearson, Arthur, 1918-1919
	Peaslee, Amos J., 1925-1932
	Pell, Herbert C., 1930-1932
	Pershing, John J., 1917-1934
	Perin, Charles Page, 1918-1932
	Petherick, Charles J., 1914-1929
	Pettengill, George T., 1912
	Phelps, W. W., 1911-1923
BOX 78	Philadelphia, Pa., newspapers, 1916-1922
	Pleadwell, Frank L., 1913-1935
	Plunkett, Charles P., 1909-1928
	Poincaré, Raymond
	Pollen, A. H., 1916-1918
	Poole, Burnell, 1920-1925
	Powell, Halsey, 1915-1924
	Powell, J. W., 1915-1927
	Pratt, William V. 1913-1918
BOX 79	1919-1923
	Preparedness, 1913-1930
	Price, H. B., 1918-1922
	Pringle, Joel Roberts Poinsett, 1909-1927
BOX 80	Prohibition, 1922-1932
	Promotion by selection, 1906-1936
	Publishers, 1919-1931
	Putnam, George H., 1919-1927
	Pye, W. S., 1914
	Queenstown Association, 1919-1930
	Rathom, John R., 1919-1923
	Ratyé, Admiral, 1918

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Reading, Rufus, 1918
	Recommendations for awards, 1919
	Reid, Elizabeth M., 1917-1921
	Reorganization, 1909-1920
	Retired Officers Association, 1931
BOX 81	Reuterdaahl, Henry, 1907-1930
	Reval, Paolo Thaon de, 1918-1920
	Rhoades, George C, 1917-1922
	Riddell, George, 1918-1921
	Ridgely, Frank, 1919-1921
	Rieder, Emily F., 1918-1922
	Ritter, Henry S., 1918-1923
	Rivers, William C., 1936
	Robinette, Edward B., 1918-1921
	Robinson, John K., 1913-1927
	Robinson, S. S., 1919-1925
	Rodgers, Thomas S., 1918-1921
	Rodgers, William L., 1913-1929
	Rodman, Hugh, 1916-1919
BOX 82	Roosevelt, Franklin D., 1914-1933
	Roosevelt, Theodore (1858-1919), 1901-1929
	Roosevelt, Theodore (1887-1914), 1921-1925
	Round Table, 1907-1936
	Rowcliff, Gilbert J., 1920-1932
	Rush, William R., 1913-1917
	Saint Andrew's Society, 1919-1922
	Saint George's School, Harpenden, 1918-1924
	<i>Saratoga</i> , 1916-1936
	Sayles, W. R., 1914-1919
	Scales, Archibald H., 1919-1921
	Scammell, J. Marius, 1921-1935
	Schofield, Frank H., 1915-1920
	Schuyler, Garret L., 1919-1920
BOX 83	<i>Scientific American</i> , 1913-1924
	Scott, Percy, 1903-1919
	Scouts (boy, girl, and sea), 1917-1935
	Seamen's Church Institute, 1918-1933
	Senn, Thomas J., 1921
	Share, H. H., 1917-1921
	Sharp, W. G., 1917
	Sheahan, Henry Beston, 1919-1923
	Simon and Schuster, 1924-1925
	Simplified Spelling Society, 1918
	Simpson, Edward, 1913-1919
BOX 84	Sims, A. Varley, 1915-1920
	Sims, William Sowden, spelling of middle name, 1919-1924

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Sinn Fein, 1919-1923
	Societies and clubs.
	British, 1917-1919
	U.S., 1915-1931
	Spanish-American War, 1914
	Speaking trips
	Lectures, 1919-1935
BOX 85	Liberty Loan, 1919
	Sprague, Frank J., 1919-1932
	Stanton, Frank, 1919-1920
	Stanworth, Charles S., 1916-1924
	Stark, H. R., 1914-1936
	Stearns, Clark D., 1904-1923
	Stetson, Cushing, 1914-1920
	Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, N.J., 1921-1923
BOX 86	Stirling, Yates, Jr., 1914-1922
	Stockton, Gilchrist, 1921-1930
	Strauss, Joseph, 1913-1919
	Street, Julian, 1919-1951
	Strong, Vesey, 1917-1918
	Submarines, 1914-1928
	Submarine atrocities, 1923-1929
BOX 87	Sulgrave Institution, 1917-1924
	Sutherland, Duke of, 1918
	Symington, Powers, 1913-1918
	Taussig, Edward D., 1913-1919
	Taussig, Joseph K., 1916-1931
	Tavern Club, 1921-1922
	Taylor, C. Carlisle, 1918-1921
	Taylor, David W., 1915-1918
	Taylor, John R. M., 1917
	Technical, 1913-1930
	Tennant, Charles L. (Thompson, Lillian M.), 1918-1922
	Theall, E. S., 1916-1917
	Thomas, Lucien Irving, 1918-1931
	Thompson, Robert M., 1919-1922
BOX 88	Thursby, Cecil, 1918
	Timmons, John W., 1919-1921
	Timpson, Lawrence, 1917-1921
	Tobey, E. C., 1917-1932
	Tod, Robert E., 1920-1921
	Tomb, J. H., 1917-1922
	Tomb, W. V., 1918-1921
	Train, Charles R., 1913-1932
	Trench, Martin E., 1913-1922
	Troland, James R., 1919-1920

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Turnbull, A. D., 1920-1925
	Twining, Nathan C., 1912-1923
	United States History Association, 1922-1928
	Universities
BOX 89	Upton, Edgar W., 1918-1919
	Van Auken, W. R., 1922-1936
	Vernou, Walter N., 1916-1920
	Veterans of Foreign Wars, 1919-1936
	<i>Victory at Sea</i>
	Villarey, C. di, 1917-1918
	Wainwright, Richard, 1903-1922
	War College, 1913-1920
	Ward, Henry H., 1909-1921
	Washburn, H.C.
BOX 90	Washington, Horace Lee, 1917-1922
	Watt, Richard M., 1913-1914
	Weems, P. V. H., 1919-1928
	Wellels, Roger, 1917-1918
	Wemyss, Rosslyn, 1917-1920
	Whitaker, Herman, 1917-1918
	White, Richard D., 1909-1929
	White, William P., 1916-1924
	White, William Russell, 1912-1922
	Whitehead, C. J., 1921-1924
	Whittlesey, Humes H., 1910-1932
	Wickersham, George W., 1918-1922
	Winslow, C. M., 1911-1921
	Wilbur, Curtis D., 1925
	Wile, Frederic William, 1917-1932
	Wiles, Irving R., 1919-1929
BOX 91	Wilkinson, Spenser, 1918-1932
	Williams, C. S., 1919-1924
	Williams College, Williamstown, Mass., 1920
	Williams, Roger, 1910-1923
	Wilson, George G., 1912-1925
	Wilson, Henry B., 1916-1924
	Wilson, Woodrow, 1917-1918
	Winn, Condie K., 1918-1935
	Winslow, George F., 1919-1922
	Wolkoff, N., 1918-1919
	Wood, D. M., 1921
	Wood, Frederick S., 1924
	Wood, Henry A. Wise, 1919-1926
	Wright, Frederick George, 1918-1919
	Wright, Henry T., 1916-1924
	Wygant, Benyaurd B., 1918-1935

Correspondence, 1856-1951

Container

Contents

	Yarnell, Harry E., 1908-1935
	YMCA invitations and related matter, 1918-1933
	Zogbaum, Rufus F., Jr., 1912-1922
BOX 92-108	Subject File, 1897-1940 Letters received, copies of letters sent, memoranda, reports, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX 92	Awards Correspondence General List of recommendations for London Medal Board report Recommendations for California trip 1922-1923
BOX 93	1934 Canada trip, 1922 Decorations, 1919, 1928 District of Columbia trip and visit to White House, 1932 England trip, 1921 Fitness reports, 1915-1916 Florida trip 1923 1928 Naval reforms, "The Sad Story, " 1909
BOX 94	Overall accounts of World War I (9 folders)
BOX 95	(10 folders)
BOX 96	Organization of the navy Peoria, Ill., trip, 1923
BOX 97	Relations with Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) 1897-1908, July Relations with Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) 1908, Aug.-1910, undated Letters from Roosevelt, 1901-1910 Safety at sea, 1912-1936
BOX 98	Senate investigation of the naval conduct of World War I (7 folders)
BOX 99	(6 folders)
BOX 100	(2 folders) Sims bust project, 1919-1940 Correspondence Scrapbook Clippings and printed matter Target practice

Subject File, 1897-1940

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 101	1901, reports of Sims 1902-1909, undated, reports Trip abroad, 1910 World War I Historical Section, London, England
BOX 102-108	Speech, Article, and Book File, 1910-1935 Manuscript, near-print, and printed copies of speeches and writings of Sims, and correspondence and notes concerning his writings. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 102	1910-1927
BOX 103	1930, Lowell lectures, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 1935 Miscellaneous "Promotion by Selection" <i>Army and Navy Journal</i> correspondence Captains in agreement Captains in disagreement Captains passed over
BOX 104	Clippings, <i>Army and Navy Journal</i> Commanders in agreement Commanders in disagreement Commanders passed over Comments Comments and answers to letters
BOX 105	Distribution Flag officers in agreement Flag officers in disagreement General notes Lieutenant commanders in agreement Lieutenant commanders in disagreement Lieutenant commanders passed over Negotiations re publishing
BOX 106	Proof Reactions Selection board and method of procedure Service opinion on 1936 Undated Printed copies of speeches and articles by Sims Notes used for speeches by Sims
BOX 107	Notes used for speeches by Sims
BOX 108	Notes used for speeches by Sims Miscellaneous papers

Speech, Article, and Book File, 1910-1935

Container

Contents

Speeches and articles by others

BOX 109-113	Miscellany, 1876-1936 Orders to duty, mementos, typescript of an unpublished biography of Sims, and miscellaneous unidentified material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
BOX 109	Autograph book from welcoming dinner, Newport, R.I., 1922, Oct. 30 Biographical material Biography file Unpublished biography by Tracy B. Kittredge Pages 1- 609
BOX 110	Pages 610-1022
BOX 111	Pages 1203-1496
BOX 112	Pages 1497-1525 and miscellany Calling cards, programs, menus, and other items Humorous verse Miscellaneous papers Orders 1876-1906
BOX 113	1907-1912 Chronological list Photographs <i>See also Oversize</i> Programs Tributes Unidentified papers
BOX 114-141	Clippings and Printed Matter, 1891-1937 Newspaper clippings and miscellaneous publications. Arranged chronologically by year, where possible, but otherwise unsorted.
BOX 114	Clippings 1891-1908
BOX 115	1908-1911
BOX 116	1912-1917
BOX 117	1917-1918
BOX 118	1918
BOX 119-121	1919
BOX 122-126	1920
BOX 127	1920-1921
BOX 128-131	1921
BOX 132	1921-1922
BOX 133	1922
BOX 134	1923
BOX 135	1924-1925
BOX 136	1925
BOX 137	1926-1931

Clippings and Printed Matter, 1891-1937

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 138	1932-1935
BOX 139	1935-1937, undated
BOX 140	Printed matter Miscellaneous
BOX 141	<i>Unite and Live</i> , record of the work of the British committee for entertaining American forces, 1919
BOX 142-153	Addition, 1884-1951 Correspondence, invitations, speeches and articles, photographs, and printed matter. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 142	Orders to duty, 1884-1925 General correspondence, 1900-1940 Special correspondence, 1900-1951 Arnold, W. F., 1907-1917 Astor, Nancy, 1918-1928
BOX 143	America's tribute to British seamen, 1919-1920 Babcock, A., 1919-1931 Babcock, John V., 1912-1948
BOX 144	Baker, George B., 1919-1920 Baldrige, Harry A., 1915-1951 Bayly, Sir Lewis, 1918-1922 Benson, William Shepherd, 1905-1919 Berrien, Frank D., 1919 Bristol, Mark L., 1919-1920 Brownrigg, Douglass, 1920-1921 Cone, Hutch I., 1914-1921 Conz, Ugo, 1919 Doubleday, Page & Co., 1919-1937 Edwards, W. Atlee, 1919-1925 Evans, Frank T., 1920 Ellicott, John M., 1919-1922 Everett, Allan F., 1921 Foote, Percy W., 1919 Gardiner, William H., 1920 Hagerman, Herbert J., 1919-1932 Harper & Brothers, 1937 Hughes, Stanley C., 1917-1922 Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1914-1937
BOX 145	Jellicoe, John R., 1920 Kittredge, Tracy B., 1919-1940 Letters of congratulations, 1917-1930 Little, Brown & Co., 1936 McKean, Josiah, 1913-1919 Moses, Edward P., 1920 Niblack, Albert P., 1918-1919

	O'Laughlin, John Callan, 1925
	Pleadwell, Frank L., 1916-1919
	Pollen, A. H., 1918
	Poundstone, Homer C., 1903-1936
	Pringle, Joel Roberts Poinsett, 1918
	Rathom, Joel R., 1922
	Retirement letters, 1922
	Reuterdaahl, Henry, 1919-1928
	Roberts, Kenneth Lewis, 1936
	Rodgers, Raymond, 1917
	St. George's School, Newport, R. I., 1919-1935
	Sims, Gordon, 1919
	Stark, Harold R., 1920-1932
	Symington, Powers, 1914-1920
	Tobey, E. C., 1919-1921
	Voysey, Charles, A., 1917-1938
	White, R. Drace, 1908-1912
BOX 146	Speech, article, and book file, 1904-1935, undated
	Article file, 1904-1935
	"The Practice Character of the Naval War College," 1912
	Articles about Sims
	Lecture tour managers, 1919-1932
	Pound Lecture Bureau, 1920-1922
	Speaking engagements, 1914-1924
	Notes, undated
BOX 147	Miscellany, 1894-1950
	Biographical material, 1916-1929
	Birthday greetings, 1914-1922
	Books given to Sims, 1918-1923
	Calendars, 1932-1935
	California trip, 1923
	Cards
BOX 148	Cards
	Christmas cards, 1917-1936
	Christmas letters, 1917
	Claims of relationship with the Sims family, 1917-1935
	Clippings, 1909-1950
	Articles about Sims
	Death and funeral, 1936
BOX 149	Farewell letters, 1919
	Financial papers, 1917-1935
	Funeral and estate, 1936
	Gifts of books, 1918-1932
	Gifts to Sims, 1910-1926
	Honors, academic and military, 1906-1936
	Invitation file

Addition, 1884-1951

Container

Contents

BOX 150	1917-1919 1920-1937 Boston, Mass., 1923-1926 Invitation and speaking engagements, 1913-1934 Newport, R. I., 1923-1936 (2 folders)
BOX 151	Namesakes and godchildren, 1918-1933 Naval matters, 1907-1935 Newport, R.I. City manager plan Public life Photographs and portraits, 1909-1937 Langiér, A., 1917-1925 Quistgaard, J. W., 1913-1928 Resco, Micheline, 1922-1923 Photographs of portraits
BOX 152	Request for photographs, 1909-1936 Printed matter, 1894-1840 Programs and menus, 1905-1936
BOX 153	Programs and menus, 1905-1936 Requests for autographs, 1918-1936 Unfinished business, 1918-1939
BOX OV 1	Oversize Photographs Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which they were removed.
BOX OV 1	Miscellany Photographs (Container 113)