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.
Reuterdahl, 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

Date	*Event*
1858, Oct. 15	Born, Port Hope, Ontario, Canada

1880	Graduated., United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1895-1896	Intelligence officer, *Charleston* on the China Station
1896-1900	Naval attaché, Paris, France; Madrid, Spain; and St. Petersburg, Russia
1900-1902	Duty in the *Kentucky*, *Monterey*, and *Brooklyn* 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 *Minnesota*
1911-1913	Student and instructor, United States Naval War College, Newport, R.I.
1913-1915	Commanded Torpedo Flotilla, Atlantic Fleet
1915-1917	Commanded *Nevada*
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 *The Victory at Sea*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday
1922	Retired from U.S. Navy
1934	Published "Promotion by Selection," in *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute*, 60 (June 1934)
1935	Published *Promotion by Selection in the Navy*. 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 Reuterdahl, 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

Container	*Series*
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 12-34	General, 1881-1949 Letters received and copies of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 35-36	Letters of Condolence, 1936-1937 Letters received by the Sims family on the death of William Sowden Sims. Arranged alphabetically.
BOX 37-44	Routine, 1912-1936 Letters received and copies of letters sent. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent or type.
BOX 45-91	Special, 1898-1951 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
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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.
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BOX 114-141	Clippings and Printed Matter, 1891-1937 Newspaper clippings and miscellaneous publications. Arranged chronologically by year, where possible, but otherwise unsorted.
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Arranged by type of material.

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Photographs

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