

T. O. Selfridge Papers

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

Prepared by Ruth S. Nicholson



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2011

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Congress Manuscript Division, 2012

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Collection Summary

Title: T. O. Selfridge Papers

Span Dates: 1852-1926

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1858-1880)

ID No.: MSS52720

Creator: Selfridge, T. O. (Thomas Oliver), 1836-1924

Extent: 1,900 items ; 8 containers ; 2 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

Abstract: Naval officer and explorer. Correspondence, journals, logbooks, notebooks, scrapbooks, and miscellaneous papers relating primarily to the American naval expedition to the Isthmus of Darien (Panama) headed by Selfridge. Includes other aspects of his naval career.

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

Ammen, Daniel, 1820-1898--Correspondence.

Benjamin, J. P. (Judah Philip), 1811-1884--Correspondence.

Collins, Edward Knight, 1802-1878.

Davidson, George, 1825-1911--Correspondence.

Evans, W. W. (Walton White), 1817-1886--Correspondence.

Fox, Gustavus Vasa, 1821-1883--Correspondence.

Francis, James Bicheno, 1815-1892--Correspondence.

Jervis, John B. (John Bloomfield), 1795-1885--Correspondence.

Latrobe, Benjamin Henry, 1806-1878--Correspondence.

Peirce, Benjamin, 1809-1880--Correspondence.

Pickett, John T. (John Thomas), 1822-1884.

Porter, John L. (John Luke), 1813-1893--Correspondence.

Selfridge, T. O. (Thomas Oliver), 1836-1924.

Selfridge, Thomas Oliver, 1804-1902--Correspondence.

Steele, J. Dutton (John Dutton), 1810-1886--Correspondence.

Organizations

Confederate States of America. Confederate States of America records.

Confederate States of America. Navy.

Cumberland (Frigate)

Merrimack (Frigate)

United States Darien Exploring Expedition (1870)

United States Darien Exploring Expedition (1871 and 1873)

Subjects

Canals.

Surveys--Panama--Panama, Isthmus of.

Places

Darien (Panama and Colombia)--Description and travel.

Panama Canal (Panama)

Panama, Isthmus of (Panama)--Discovery and exploration.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Naval operations.

Occupations

Explorers.
Naval officers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of T. O. Selfridge, naval officer and explorer, were deposited in the Library of Congress by the Naval Historical Foundation in 1949 and converted to a gift in 1998.

Processing History

The papers of T. O. Selfridge were arranged and described in 1969. The finding aid was revised in 2011.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of T. O. Selfridge 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.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, T. O. Selfridge Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1836, Feb. 6	Born, Charlestown, Mass.
1854	Graduated, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md..
1855-1856	Duty in USS <i>Independence</i> , Pacific Squadron
1857	Duty in USS <i>Nautilus</i>
1857-1860	Duty in USS <i>Vincennes</i> , Africa Squadron
1860-1862	Duty in USS <i>Cumberland</i> , North Atlantic Blockade Squadron
1862	Duty in USS <i>Alligator</i>
1862-1863	Commanded USS <i>Cairo</i> , Mississippi Squadron
1863-1864	Commanded USS <i>Conestoga</i> and USS <i>Manitou</i> , Mississippi Squadron
1864-1865	Commanded USS <i>Osage</i> and USS <i>Vindicator</i> , Mississippi Squadron

1865	Married Ellen F. Shepley (died 1905)
1865-1867	Duty at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1867-1868	Commanded USS <i>Macedonian</i>
1869-1874	Special duty in United States Darien Exploring Expeditions, surveying the Isthmus of Darien for an interoceanic canal
1875	Commander, Boston Navy Yard, Boston, Mass.
1877-1878	On leave from the navy
1878	Special duty surveying the Amazon and Madeira rivers, South America
1879	Special delegate to the International Canal Congress, Paris, France
1881-1884	Commanded Torpedo Station, Newport, R. I.
1885-1887	Commanded USS <i>Omaha</i> , Asiatic Squadron
1888	Tried and acquitted by court-martial
1889-1890	Duty as member of the Board of Inspection
1890-1893	Commanded Boston Navy Yard, Boston, Mass.
1894-1895	President, Board of Inspection
1895-1897	Commander, European Squadron
1896	Promoted to rear admiral Special representative to the coronation of Nicholas II of Russia
1898	Retired from the navy
1907 .	Married Gertrude Wildes
1924	Published <i>Memoirs of Thomas O. Selfridge, Jr., Rear Admiral, U.S.N.</i> New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons
1924, Feb. 4	Died, Washington, D.C

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Thomas Oliver Selfridge (1836-1924) span the years 1852-1926, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1858-1880. The papers are distributed over his life span and closely document his career and his interests. The collection is organized into five series: [Logbooks, Journals, and Notebooks](#); [Letterbooks and Letterpress Books](#); [Correspondence](#); [Subject File](#); and [Miscellany](#).

The [Logbooks, Journals, and Notebooks](#) series and [Letterbooks and Letterpress Books](#) cover the years from 1854 to 1885. The [Correspondence](#) file includes letters to and from J. P. Benjamin, John Luke Porter, John B. Jervis, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Edward Knight Collins, and T. O. Selfridge's father, Thomas Oliver Selfridge, Sr.

Included in the collection are maps, correspondence, drawings, and other material pertaining to the United States Darien Exploring Expeditions of 1870, 1871 and 1873, which were headed by Selfridge in 1869-1874. Correspondents on the subject include Daniel Ammen, Edward Knight Collins, George Davidson, W. W. Evans, Gustavus Vasa Fox, James Bicheno Francis, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Benjamin Peirce, and J. Dutton Steele. Also in the collection are correspondence and reports documenting Selfridge's court-martial in 1888. Other special topics include the sinking of the USS *Cumberland* by the USS *Merrimac* in 1862 and the purchase of the John T. Pickett Papers (Records of the Confederate States of America) in Canada in 1872.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in five series:

- [Logbooks, Journals, and Notebooks, 1854-1885](#)
- [Letterbooks and Letterpress Books, 1867-1880](#)
- [Correspondence, 1864-1919](#)
- [Subject File, 1852-1889](#)
- [Miscellany, 1866-1926](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-2	<u>Logbooks, Journals, and Notebooks, 1854-1885</u> Accounts, logs, journals, and a variety of titled notebooks. Includes journals from the Darien Exploring Expedition. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 3-4	<u>Letterbooks and Letterpress Books, 1867-1880</u> Copies of letters sent by Selfridge as commander of different ships and ventures. Includes letterbooks for the Darien Exploring Expedition. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 4	<u>Correspondence, 1864-1919</u> Letters received and a few drafts of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 5-7	<u>Subject File, 1852-1889</u> Bills and receipts, correspondence, drawings, maps, miscellaneous material, newspaper clippings, printed matter, reports, scrapbooks, and statistics concerning the Amazon River Survey, Selfridge's court-martial trial, and the Darien Exploring Expedition. Arranged alphabetically by topic and therein by type of material.
BOX 8	<u>Miscellany, 1866-1926</u> Remarks, reports, photographs, and notes and sketches. Arranged by topic.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-2	Logbooks, Journals, and Notebooks, 1854-1885 Accounts, logs, journals, and a variety of titled notebooks. Includes journals from the Darien Exploring Expedition. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1	Logbook, USS <i>Independence</i> , 1854, Sept.-1856, May
BOX 1	Journals
BOX 1	1870, Feb.-June, USS <i>Hubbard</i>
BOX 1	1870, Feb.-1873, Apr.
BOX 1	1878, USS <i>Enterprise</i>
BOX 1	1878
BOX 2	General order book, Asiatic Station, 1885
BOX 2	Notebooks
BOX 2	Electricity
BOX 2	Explosives
BOX 2	Torpedos
BOX 2	Watch, quarter, and station bill book
BOX 3-4	Letterbooks and Letterpress Books, 1867-1880 Copies of letters sent by Selfridge as commander of different ships and ventures. Includes letterbooks for the Darien Exploring Expedition. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 3	Letterbooks
BOX 3	1867, June-1869, Oct., USS <i>Macedonian</i> , 1867; and 1868, Oct.-1870, June, USS <i>Nipsic</i>
BOX 4	1870, Dec.-1871, June
BOX 4	1871, June-1872, Nov.
BOX 4	Letterpress book, 1875, Sept.-1877, Apr.
BOX 4	Letterbooks, USS <i>Enterprise</i>
BOX 4	1877, Mar.-1879, Jan.
BOX 4	1879, Jan.-May
BOX 4	1879, June-1880, Jan.
BOX 4	Correspondence, 1864-1919 Letters received and a few drafts of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 4	1864-1919
BOX 5-7	Subject File, 1852-1889 Bills and receipts, correspondence, drawings, maps, miscellaneous material, newspaper clippings, printed matter, reports, scrapbooks, and

Subject File, 1852-1889

Container

Contents

statistics concerning the Amazon River Survey, Selfridge's court-martial trial, and the Darien Exploring Expedition.
Arranged alphabetically by topic and therein by type of material.

BOX 5	Amazon River survey, 1875-1878
BOX 5	Court-martial, 1887-1889
BOX 6	Darien Exploring Expedition, 1869-1874, undated
BOX 6	Bills and receipts
BOX 6	Correspondence
BOX 6	Drawings
BOX 6	Maps
BOX 6	Miscellany
BOX 6	Newspaper clippings
BOX 6	Printed matter
BOX 7	Reports
BOX 7	Scrapbooks
BOX 7	Statistics, charts, and tables
BOX 8	Miscellany, 1866-1926
	Remarks, reports, photographs, and notes and sketches. Arranged by topic.
BOX 8	Remarks, reports, accounts, and other miscellaneous documents, 1866-1926
BOX 8	Copies of naval examinations, 1902
BOX 8	Photographs, mostly
BOX 8	Notes and sketches