Robert Wilson Shufeldt Papers

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

Prepared by John P. Butler

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

2011

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Collection Summary

Title: Robert Wilson Shufeldt Papers
Span Dates: 1836-1910
Bulk Dates: (bulk 1860-1880)
ID No.: MSS52688
Creator: Shufeldt, Robert Wilson, 1822-1895
Extent: 15,000 items; 37 containers; 15 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Abstract: Naval officer, explorer, and diplomat. Correspondence, journals, diaries, notebooks, logbooks, subject files, newspaper clippings, and printed matter relating to Shufeldt's career in the navy and as an explorer and diplomat.

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
Atkinson, Edward, 1827-1905.
Bache, A. D. (Alexander Dallas), 1806-1867.
Bancroft, George, 1800-1891.
Bell, Henry Haywood, 1808-1868.
Bradford, William, 1823-1892.
Carpenter, Cyrus Clay, 1829-1898.
Dahlgren, John Adolphus Bernard, 1809-1870.
Farragut, David Glasgow, 1801-1870.
Fish, Hamilton, 1808-1893.
Hargous, P. A. (Peter A.)
Henshaw, David, 1791-1852.
Hopkins, Alfred.
Jenkins, Thornton A. (Thornton Alexander), 1811-1893.
Li, Hung-chang, 1823-1901.
Mackenzie, William Slidell.
Masuki, M. Konde.
Seward, William Henry, 1801-1872.
Shufeldt, Mary Miller.
Shufeldt, Mason A.
Shufeldt, Robert Wilson, 1822-1895.
Smith, Truman, 1791-1884.
Stevens, Benjamin Franklin, 1833-1902.
Walker, John Grimes, 1835-1907.
Welles, Gideon, 1802-1878.
Wolf, John N.

Organizations
Ticonderoga (Sloop of war)
United States. Navy--History--19th century.

Subjects
Diplomatic and consular service, American--Cuba.

Places

Africa--Discovery and exploration.
Africa--Foreign relations--United States.
Asia--Foreign relations--United States.
Cuba--Foreign relations--United States.
Mexico--Discovery and exploration.
United States--Foreign relations--Africa.
United States--Foreign relations--Asia.
United States--Foreign relations--Cuba.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Naval operations.

Occupations
Diplomats.
Explorers.
Naval officers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Robert Wilson Shufeldt, naval officer, explorer, and diplomat, were deposited in the Library of Congress by the Naval Historical Foundation in 1949, 1952, and 1954, and converted to a gift in 1998.

Processing History

The papers of Robert Wilson Shufeldt were arranged and described in 1968. The finding aid was revised in 2011.

Additional Guides

In 1969 the Library published *Robert Wilson Shufeldt, a Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress*.

Copyright Status

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

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Robert Wilson Shufeldt 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, Robert Wilson Shufeldt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	*Event*
1822, Feb. 21	Born, Red Hook, N.Y.
1839	Appointed midshipman in the U.S. Navy

1839-1840	Duty in USS *United States*, Home Squadron
1840-1841	Duty in USS *Potomac*, Brazil Squadron
1841-1842	Duty in USS *Marion*, Brazil Squadron
1842-1843	Duty in USS *Bainbridge*, Home Squadron
1843-1844	Duty in USS *Potomac*, Home Squadron
1844-1845	Duty at the Naval School, Philadelphia, Pa.
1845	Promoted to passed midshipman
1845-1846	Coast survey duty
1846	Duty in USS *United States*, Africa Squadron
1846-1848	Duty in USS *Marion*, Africa and Mediterranean Squadrons
1847	Married Sarah Hutchins Abercrombie (died 1871)
1849	Duty in USS *Morris*
1850-1851	Duty in USS *Atlantic*
1851	Duty in USS *Georgia*
1851-1854	On leave from the navy
1854	Commissioned lieutenant Resigned from the navy
1854-1856	Chief officer, Collins Steamship Line
1856-1861	Commanded commercial ships and helped survey the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (Mexico)
1861-1863	Consul general, Havana, Cuba 1862 Served on a mission to Mexico
1863	Commissioned commander Commanded USS *Conemaugh*, South Atlantic Blockade Squadron
1863-1865	Commanded USS *Proteus*, East Gulf Squadron
1865-1866	Commanded USS *Hartford*, East India Squadron
1866-1868	Commanded USS *Wachusett*, East India-Asiatic Squadron
1868	Ordnance duty, New York Navy Yard

1868-1869	Commanded New York Naval Rendezvous
1869-1870	Commanded USS *Minantonomoh*
1870	Promoted to captain Ordnance duty, Portsmouth Navy Yard
1870-1871	Commanded Tehuantepec (Mexico) Survey Expedition
1871-1872	Commanded USS *Wabash*, European Squadron
1872-1873	Commanded USS *Plymouth*, European Squadron
1873-1875	Executive officer, New York Navy Yard
1875-1878	Chief of the Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting
1878-1880	Commanded USS *Ticonderoga* on a world cruise sponsored by the Department of the Navy and Department of State
1881	Naval attaché, Peking, China
1882-1884	President, Naval Advisory Board
1883-1884	Superintendent, Naval Observatory, Washington, D.C
1884	Promoted to rear admiral Retired from the navy
1889	Declined post of U.S. minister to China
1895, Nov. 6	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Robert W. Shufeldt (1822-1895) span the years 1836-1910, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1860-1880. Shufeldt's forty-five year naval career was interrupted by a nine-year period in the merchant marine service and in surveying for a proposed isthmian canal route. The correspondence for his broken-service years, however, includes many papers of interest on naval affairs.

The Shufeldt collection consists primarily of correspondence, letterbooks, and subject files, supplemented by diaries, notebooks, journals, logbooks, newspaper clippings, printed matter, and a small file of material concerning explorations in Africa by Shufeldt's youngest son, Mason. The topics of interest are the nineteenth-century navy, its growth and development; Civil War naval and diplomatic activities; foreign relations in the 1870s and 1880s, especially with Africa and Asia; and the Tehuantepec, Mexico, surveying expeditions. The collection is organized into nine series: Diaries, Notebooks, Logbooks, and Journals; Letterbooks, Letterpress Books, and Letter Index Books; Official Correspondence; General Correspondence; Subject File; Newspaper Clippings; Printed Matter; Miscellany; and Mason A. Shufeldt File.

Shufeldt resigned his commission in the navy in 1854 and entered the merchant marine to command the *Quaker City*. Later, he became interested in the construction of a canal across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico and in 1860 led an expedition through that region. In 1861, Shufeldt was appointed consul general to serve in Cuba. Correspondents for the years 1839-1861 include A. D. Bach, George Bancroft, Charles Stuart Boggs, Benjamin F. Butler, John Adolphus Dahlgren, Samuel Ffrancis Du Pont, David Glasgow Farragut, John Pendleton Kennedy, James Murray Mason, Matthew Calbraith Perry, David D. Porter, and Gideon Welles.

Shufeldt returned to active duty in the navy in 1863 with the rank of commander. During the Civil War, her served both ashore and afloat. After the Civil War, Shufeldt served at sea in the Far East and in 1868 he returned to the United States and was assigned ordnance duty ashore in New York.

In 1870, Shufeldt was promoted to the rank of captain and was assigned special duty in command of a survey expedition to Tehuantepec, Mexico. After the exploration, Shufeldt recommended that this territory be considered as a likely site for a transisthmus canal.

In 1878, Shufeldt was given command of the *Ticonderoga* that was to sail on a round-the-world cruise. The documentation for the cruise fills about one-third of the containers in this collection. After returning to the United States in 1881, he was reassigned to Peking, China, as the naval attaché.

Shufeldt was appointed president of the Naval Advisory Board, for which he served two years before retiring in 1884. It was during this last tour of duty that he helped formulate the plans for a new navy incorporating the technological advance from sail to steam propulsion and from wood to iron and steel hulls.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in nine series:

- Diaries, Notebooks, Logbooks, and Journals, 1865-1880
- Letterbooks, Letterpress Books, and Letter Index Books, 1864-1880
- Official Correspondence, 1839-1889
- General Correspondence, 1838-1900
- Subject File, 1861-1883
- Newspaper Clippings, 1859-1899
- Printed Matter, 1849-1910
- Miscellany, 1836-1893
- Mason A. Shufeldt File, 1883-1893

Description of Series

Container	*Series*
BOX 1-2	Diaries, Notebooks, Logbooks, and Journals, 1865-1880 Diaries, notebooks, log abstracts, logbooks, navigational data, journals, and other writings. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 3-4	Letterbooks, Letterpress Books, and Letter Index Books, 1864-1880 Copies of correspondence and reports sent by Shufeldt as commander of various ships. A few of the volumes are indexed.
BOX 5-10	Official Correspondence, 1839-1889 Letters received and a few drafts of letters sent. Arranged chronologically. Correspondence concerning Shufeldt's years in Cuba, the Tehuantepec Survey Expedition, and the world cruise in the Ticonderoga is in the Subject File.
BOX 11-17	General Correspondence, 1838-1900 Letters received and a few drafts of letters sent, mostly of a personal and family nature, but some material relating to Shufeldt's activities in Cuba, Mexico, and elsewhere. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 18-29	Subject File, 1861-1883 Correspondence, reports, memoranda, manuscripts, maps, printed matter, newspaper clippings, drafts of writings, bills and receipts, and miscellaneous items pertaining to Cuba, the Tehuantepec Survey Expedition, and the *Ticonderoga* world cruise. Material concerning Cuba and Tehuantepec Survey Expedition is chronologically arranged and files concerning the *Ticonderoga* are arranged according to the area covered by the cruise.
BOX 30-31	Newspaper Clippings, 1859-1899 Clippings chiefly concerned with naval incidents. Arranged alphabetically by topic.
BOX 32-33	Printed Matter, 1849-1910 Aticles, pamphlets, speeches, general orders, and other writings. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 34-35	Miscellany, 1836-1893 An account book, calling cards and invitations, notes and fragments, inventories, quartermaster reports, ship descriptions, officer register, ship specifications and blueprints, admiralty board arguments, bills, receipts, inventories, copies of treaties, certificates and awards, poetry, songs, and essays. Arranged by topic.

BOX 36-37 Mason A. Shufeldt File, 1883-1893

Correspondence, reports, writings, and miscellaneous material. This file is mostly concerned with Mason A. Shufeldt's explorations of Africa.

Arranged by topic and therein chronologically.

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Container	*Contents*
BOX 1-2	Diaries, Notebooks, Logbooks, and Journals, 1865-1880
	Diaries, notebooks, log abstracts, logbooks, navigational data, journals, and other writings.
	Arranged chronologically.
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BOX 1	Notebook, *Wachusett*, 1866-1867
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BOX 1	Mar.-June
BOX 1	June-Nov.
BOX 2	1867, Nov.-1868, Jan.
BOX 2	Journal, *Mayflower* and *Kansas*, 1870, Nov.-1871, May
BOX 2	Diary
BOX 2	1875
BOX 2	1876
BOX 2	1877
BOX 2	1878
BOX 2	Journal of F. A. Miller, *Ticonderoga*
BOX 2	1878, Dec.-1879, Aug.
BOX 2	1879, Aug.-Dec.
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BOX 3-4	Letterbooks, Letterpress Books, and Letter Index Books, 1864-1880
	Copies of correspondence and reports sent by Shufeldt as commander of various ships.
	A few of the volumes are indexed.
BOX 3	Letterbook
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BOX 3	*Wachusett*, 1866-1868
BOX 3	Letter index book, *Minantonomoh*, 1869-1870
BOX 3	Letterbook
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BOX 3	*Mayflower*, 1871, Mar.-Aug.
BOX 3	Letter index book, *Ticonderoga*, 1878, Dec.-1880, Nov.
BOX 4	Letterpress book, *Ticonderoga*
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BOX 4	1878, Dec.-1880, Nov.

Container	*Contents*
BOX 4	1879, Jan.-July
BOX 5-10	Official Correspondence, 1839-1889
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	Arranged chronologically. Correspondence concerning Shufeldt's years in Cuba, the Tehuantepec Survey Expedition, and the world cruise in the Ticonderoga is in the Subject File.
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BOX 11-17	General Correspondence, 1838-1900
	Letters received and a few drafts of letters sent, mostly of a personal and family nature, but some material relating to Shufeldt's activities in Cuba, Mexico, and elsewhere.
	Arranged chronologically.
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BOX 12	1862-1867
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BOX 17	1887-1900, undated
BOX 18-29	Subject File, 1861-1883
	Correspondence, reports, memoranda, manuscripts, maps, printed matter, newspaper clippings, drafts of writings, bills and receipts, and miscellaneous items pertaining to Cuba, the Tehuantepec Survey Expedition, and the *Ticonderoga* world cruise.
	Material concerning Cuba and Tehuantepec Survey Expedition is chronologically arranged and files concerning the *Ticonderoga* are arranged according to the area covered by the cruise.
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Container	*Contents*
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BOX 22	World cruise, *Ticonderoga*, 1879-1883, undated
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	Clippings chiefly concerned with naval incidents.
	Arranged alphabetically by topic.
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BOX 30	Gherardi, Bancroft-Walker, John, controversy
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Container	*Contents*
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BOX 31	Miscellany
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BOX 31	Sierra Leone
BOX 31	U.S. Navy
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BOX 32-33	Printed Matter, 1849-1910
	Aticles, pamphlets, speeches, general orders, and other writings. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 32	1849-1910, undated
BOX 33	*Minantonomoh*, 1869-1870
BOX 34-35	Miscellany, 1836-1893
	An account book, calling cards and invitations, notes and fragments, inventories, quartermaster reports, ship descriptions, officer register, ship specifications and blueprints, admiralty board arguments, bills, receipts, inventories, copies of treaties, certificates and awards, poetry, songs, and essays. Arranged by topic.
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BOX 35	Copies and treaties between the United States and foreign countries, 1836-1880
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BOX 36-37	Mason A. Shufeldt File, 1883-1893
	Correspondence, reports, writings, and miscellaneous material. This file is mostly concerned with Mason A. Shufeldt's explorations of Africa. Arranged by topic and therein chronologically.
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Container	*Contents*
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