

Charles O'Neil Papers

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

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Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2011

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Collection Summary

Title: Charles O'Neil Papers

Span Dates: 1833-1927

ID No.: MSS52449

Creator: O'Neil, Charles, 1842-1927

Extent: 5,500 items; 31 containers plus 1 oversize; 10 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

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

Abstract: Naval officer. Correspondence, diaries, subject files, scrapbooks, financial records, genealogical data, and photographs relating primarily to O'Neil's service as chief of the Bureau of Ordnance in the navy.

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

Dewey, George, 1837-1917.

Hale, Eugene, 1836-1918.

Long, John Davis, 1838-1915.

Moody, William H. (William Henry), 1853-1917.

O'Neil, Charles, 1842-1927.

O'Neill family.

Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945.

Roosevelt, Theodore, 1858-1919.

Organizations

United States. Navy Dept. Bureau of Ordnance.

Occupations

Naval officers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Charles O'Neil, naval officer, were deposited in the Library of Congress in 1954 and 1969 by the Naval Historical Foundation and converted to a gift in 1998.

Processing History

The O'Neil Papers were processed in 1966 and the finding aid was revised in 2011.

Additional Guides

In 1967 the Library published *Edmund Ross Colhoun, Charles O'Neil: A Register of Their Papers in the Library of Congress*.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Charles O'Neil is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Charles O'Neil 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.

Security Classified Documents

Government regulations control the use of security classified material in this collection. Manuscript Division staff can furnish information concerning access to and use of classified materials.

Preferred Citation

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

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1842, Mar. 15	Born, Manchester, England
1847	Immigrated with parents to Boston, Mass.
1861	Enlisted in the United States Navy as a master's mate
1861-1862	Duty in <i>Cumberland</i> , Home Squadron
1862	Appointed acting master
1862-1864	Duty in <i>Tioga</i> , North Atlantic Blockade Squadron
1864-1865	Duty in <i>Rhode Island</i> , North Atlantic Blockade Squadron
1865	Promoted to acting volunteer lieutenant
1865-1866	Duty in receiving-ship <i>Princeton</i> , Philadelphia, Pa.
1866-1867	Duty in <i>Shamrock</i> , European Station
1867-1868	Duty <i>Guard</i> , European Station
1868	Commissioned as lieutenant Promoted to lieutenant commander
1868-1869	Duty in <i>Ohio</i> , Boston, Mass.
1869	Married Mary Caroline Frothingham (died 1901)
1870-1871	Duty in <i>Dictator</i> , North Atlantic Squadron
1871-1872	Duty in <i>Ohio</i> , Boston, Mass.
1872	Duty in <i>Supply</i>

1872-1873	Duty in <i>Lancaster</i> , South Atlantic Squadron
1874-1876	Duty in <i>Wasp</i> , South Atlantic Squadron
1876-1877	Duty in <i>Minnesota</i> , New York, N.Y.
1877	Commanded <i>Supply</i>
1877-1879	Duty in <i>Swatara</i> , North Atlantic Station
1879-1882	Ordnance duty, Boston Navy Yard
1882-1884	Duty in <i>Richmond</i> , Asiatic Station
1884	Promoted to commander
1884-1886	Inspector of ordnance, Cold Springs, N. Y.
1886-1889	Inspector of ordnance, New York Navy Yard
1889-1890	Commanded <i>Dolphin</i> , North Atlantic Squadron
1890-1892	Superintendent, Naval Gun Factory, Washington, D. C.
1892-1896	Commanded <i>Marblehead</i>
1897	Promoted to captain
1897-1904	Chief, Bureau of Ordnance, with the rank of rear admiral
1903	Promoted to rear admiral
1904	Retired from United States Navy
1904-1926	President, Naval Relief Society
1905-1927	Resided with relatives in New York, Maine, and Massachusetts
1927, Feb. 28	Died, Naval Hospital, Chelsea, Mass.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Charles O'Neil (1842-1927) span the years 1833-1927, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1872-1922. In his long naval career, O'Neil advanced from volunteer enlisted man's status in 1861 to that of a rear admiral in 1897. Alternating duty at sea and ashore, O'Neil was involved with a variety of naval activities, most of which are documented in these papers. They are composed mainly of diaries, correspondence, subject files, photographs and miscellaneous material. The collection is organized into seven series: [Diaries](#); [General Correspondence](#); [Official Correspondence](#); [Subject File](#); [Speech, Article, and Book File](#); [Miscellany](#), and [Oversize](#).

There is an almost complete set of [diaries](#) extending from 1872 to 1927. The entries in the diaries relate not only to O'Neil's direct personal interests, but also reflect upon the general problems of the navy and of naval service in the over fifty-year span of recorded notations. Especially interesting are O'Neil's comments on various events in the Spanish-American War, including such incidents as the blowing up of the *Maine* and the defeat of the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay. There are a number of letters from O'Neil to his parents, John and Mary Anne Francis O'Neil, and letters exchanged with his son, Ricard Frothingham O'Neil.

The correspondence in the collection covers the greater part of O'Neil's naval career. There is a considerable amount of family correspondence and, during his retirement years, a large number of exchanges with former shipmates and with Confederate officers who had been his adversaries during the Civil War.

The years from 1897 to 1904, when O'Neil was chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, are most fully documented. Letterpress books in the [Official Correspondence](#) and material in the [Subject File](#) series trace O'Neil's role as a pioneer in naval ordnance and in the development of armor plating. Interspersed throughout the collection are ordnance data, including reports, tests, experiments, and memoranda on a wide variety of technical subjects. Correspondence with individuals and companies supports this ordnance material. As chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, O'Neil communicated with congressmen and cabinet officers, and the papers document, the congressional investigations of the Gathman high explosive controversy from 1913 to 1915. Correspondents in the collection include George Dewey, Eugene Hale, John Davis Long, William H. Moody, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, and John W. Weeks.

O'Neil's sea duty included service in most of the overseas squadrons that the navy maintained from 1861 to 1896. Coverage of O'Neil's early naval career, 1861 to 1872, is sparse. A few items in the genealogical files are the only documentation on O'Neil's first few years of naval service. But from 1872 to 1896, when O'Neil was usually alternating duty at sea and ashore, his career as a naval officer is more fully covered. Especially interesting are his activities as commander of the *Marblehead*, from 1892 to 1896. During this command he became involved in the Bluefields Mosquito Reservation Revolt in Nicaragua and with the massacre of Armenian nationals in Turkey, both of which are treated in the [Subject File](#).

The papers indicate that O'Neil made several unsuccessful attempts to prepare his memoirs for publication. A great many of his fragmentary notes are to be found in the [Miscellany](#) series. Similarly, a large number of notes and fragments on his genealogical research into the O'Neil and the Francis families are in the genealogical files. Although he composed many articles pertaining to his memoirs, only one appears to have been published, "Engagement between the *Cumberland* and the *Merrimack*," in the June 1922 issue of the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*. Photographs, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks on various aspects of his naval career, plus some financial papers and a biographical file round out the collection.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in seven series:

- [Diaries, 1862-1927](#)
- [General Correspondence, 1858-1927](#)
- [Official Correspondence, 1874-1904](#)
- [Subject File, 1892-1915](#)
- [Speech, Article, and Book File, 1898-1925](#)
- [Miscellany, 1833-1927](#)
- [Oversize](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-6	<u>Diaries, 1862-1927</u> Diaries. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 7-12	<u>General Correspondence, 1858-1927</u> Letters received a few copies of letters sent supplemented by memoranda and reports. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 13	<u>Official Correspondence, 1874-1904</u> Letterpress books of copies of letters to and from O'Neil as chief of the Bureau of Ordnance. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 14-17	<u>Subject File, 1892-1915</u> Correspondence, memoranda, reports, printed matter, statistics, and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX 18-23	<u>Speech, Article, and Book File, 1898-1925</u> Handwritten and typewritten drafts of O'Neil's autobiography. An article and untitled speeches are included. Organized by type of writing or title.
BOX 24-31	<u>Miscellany, 1833-1927</u> Biography file, financial papers, photographs, printed matter, and scrapbooks of genealogical material, and of newspaper clippings. Organized by type of material.
BOX OV 1	<u>Oversize</u> Photographs. Described according to the series and container from which they were removed.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-6	Diaries, 1862-1927 Diaries. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1	1862-1863, 1872-1890
BOX 2	1891-1900
BOX 3	1901-1910
BOX 4	1911-1913, 1915-1917
BOX 5	1918-1919, 1921-1923
BOX 6	1924-1927
BOX 7-12	General Correspondence, 1858-1927 Letters received a few copies of letters sent supplemented by memoranda and reports. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 7	1858-1897
BOX 8	1898-1899
BOX 9	1900-1902
BOX 10	1903-1907
BOX 11	1913-Apr. 1925
BOX 12	1925-1927, May,
BOX 12	Index of outgoing letters, 1918-1925
BOX 13	Official Correspondence, 1874-1904 Letterpress books of copies of letters to and from O'Neil as chief of the Bureau of Ordnance. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 13	1897-1904
BOX 14-17	Subject File, 1892-1915 Correspondence, memoranda, reports, printed matter, statistics, and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX 14	Advantages of stabillite
BOX 14	Douglass, Frederick
BOX 14	Gathman high explosive controversy
BOX 14	Massacre of the Armenians in Turkey
BOX 15	Nicaragua, Bluefields Mosquito Revolt
BOX 15	Ordnance
BOX 15	Armor

Subject File, 1892-1915

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 16	Foreign countries
BOX 16	Austria
BOX 16	France
BOX 16	Germany
BOX 16	Great Britain
BOX 16	Italy
BOX 16	Sweden
BOX 17	Matériel
BOX 17	Miscellany
BOX 17	Sicard, Montgomery
BOX 17	Submarines
BOX 17	Woodbridge case
BOX 18-23	Speech, Article, and Book File, 1898-1925 Handwritten and typewritten drafts of O'Neil's autobiography. An article and untitled speeches are included. Organized by type of writing or title.
BOX 18	"Engagement between the <i>Cumberland</i> and the <i>Merrimack</i> ," <i>United States Naval Institute Proceedings</i> , 1922
BOX 18	Untitled speeches
BOX 18	"Autobiography of Charles O'Neil," unpublished book
BOX 19	"Autobiography of Charles O'Neil," unpublished book
BOX 20	Drafts of "Autobiography of Charles O'Neil"
BOX 20	"Recollection of the Mustang"
BOX 21	"Recollection of the Mustang"
BOX 22	"Recollection of the Mustang"
BOX 22	"Biography of Charles O'Neil," by Richard O'Neil, unpublished article
BOX 23	Notes and memoranda
BOX 24-31	Miscellany, 1833-1927 Biography file, financial papers, photographs, printed matter, and scrapbooks of genealogical material, and of newspaper clippings. Organized by type of material.
BOX 24	Biographical file
BOX 24	Envelopes with notations
BOX 24	Memorabilia
BOX 24	Financial papers
BOX 24	Memorabilia
BOX 24	Calling cards, invitations, menus, certificate of Military Order of the Loyal Legion, and George Dewey Medal
BOX 25	Christmas cards, greetings, announcements, and related matter
BOX 26	Newspaper clippings
BOX 27	Photographs
BOX 28	Photographs <i><u>See Oversize</u></i>
BOX 28	Printed matter
BOX 29	Scrapbooks

Miscellany, 1833-1927

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 29	Genealogies of the O'Neil and Francis families, including correspondence and photographs (2 vols.)
BOX 30	Newspaper clippings, photographs, and assorted items (2 vols.)
BOX 31	(2 vols.)
BOX OV 1	Oversize Photographs. Described according to the series and container from which they were removed.
BOX OV 1	Photographs.