



# Smithsonian

*National Air and Space Museum*

## Walter and Arthur Wellman Collection

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National Air and Space Museum Archives  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	National Air and Space Museum Archives
<b>Title:</b>	Walter and Arthur Wellman Collection
<b>Date:</b>	1885-1934
<b>Identifier:</b>	NASM.2004.0007
<b>Extent:</b>	3.25 Linear feet 1.12 Cubic feet (1 legal size document box, 1 flat oversize box, 4 microfilm boxes)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	This collection consists of material relating to Walter Wellman's polar explorations (1894-1909) and the role his brother, Arthur Wellman, played in managing the base camp on Dane's Island during the 1909 attempt to reach the North Pole by air.
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Image(s): Wellman Representative Image</a>

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Jean Wellman Thickens Cooper, Gift, 2003

### Processing Information

Most of the lantern slides were originally housed in a black metal medicine chest, labeled: "The Wellman Polar Expedition 1906 - trademark 'Tabloid' Brand Medicine Chest." The archivist suspects this is the same medicine chest that appears in one of the photographs and was taken on the 1906-1909 expedition, fulfilling its original duty. Possibly Arthur Wellman used the chest as well at his lectures as an artifact.

### Preferred Citation

Walter and Arthur Wellman Collection, Acc. 2004-0007, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

### Restrictions

No restrictions on access.

### Conditions Governing Use

Material is subject to Smithsonian Terms of Use. Should you wish to use NASM material in any medium, please submit an Application for Permission to Reproduce NASM Material, available at [Permissions Requests](#) .

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## Biographical Note

Walter Wellman (1858-1934) was an American journalist and explorer who attempted unsuccessfully both to reach the North Pole and to cross the Atlantic Ocean by powered airship. Born in Ohio, Wellman founded a weekly newspaper in Sutton, Nebraska, when he was 14, and later founded The Cincinnati Evening Post in 1879. For many years, he was the Washington correspondent for the Chicago Herald. He wrote of his many aerial and exploring adventures for the newspapers, including his 1891 claim that he had identified the exact spot where Christopher Columbus landed in San Salvador.

Walter Wellman made his first attempt to reach the North Pole by land in 1894, leaving from base camp at Virgo Harbor, Danes Island. In 1898, Wellman headed north to Franz Joseph Land to search for the missing Swedish balloonist Salomon August Andrée and crew who had disappeared the year before in an attempt on the pole. In the spring of 1899, Wellman tried again to sled to the pole; again he failed. After these two sledding expeditions, Wellman decided that the best approach to the North Pole was by air. By 1906, he had raised the necessary funds to construct an airship, airship hangar, and base camp at Virgo Harbor. Unfortunately, his airship expeditions in search of the geographic North Pole were also unsuccessful; his first airship flight in 1907 only covered twenty miles, while his second attempt in 1909 covered only forty miles. During this latter (and final) attempt, Walter's brother Arthur Wellman managed the expedition's base camp on Dane's Island.

After learning that Robert Peary and Frederick Cook both claimed to have reached the North Pole in 1909, Walter Wellman abandoned his own efforts. In 1910, Wellman tried for his last aviation milestone, attempting a transatlantic crossing in his airship America. He was not successful.

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## Scope and Contents

This donation consists of material relating to Walter Wellman's polar explorations (1894-1909) and the role his brother, Arthur Wellman, played in managing the base camp on Dane's Island during the 1909 attempt to reach the North Pole by air. The following material is included: correspondence between Walter and Arthur Wellman and their respective immediate families, as well as correspondence between the Wellmans and Andrew Aagaard; an 1889 financial ledger sheet kept by Aagaard; newspaper articles about the Wellmans' adventures; airship fabric; black and white photographs of Wellman, the airship, crew members, and the base camp, including quarters and the airship hangar; glass plate photographs of the same scenes, which were evidently used by Arthur Wellman for his lectures; two copies of a poster announcing Arthur Wellman's lecture entitled, "Spitzbergen;" seven promotional postcards; and Arthur Wellman's notebook, which contains a Last Will and Testament, notes on the condition of the ship, and diary entries from the 1909 polar attempt. There are also seven black and white photographs of Walter Wellman's transatlantic attempt in the airship America. The last item in the collection is a set of five CDs produced by Jean and Steve Cooper, which contain scans of the entire collection.

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## Arrangement

This collection was arranged by the archivist into 3 series:

Series 1: Correspondence

Series 2: Miscellaneous

Series 3: Photographs & Lantern Slides

## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

- Aeronautics
- Airships
- Wellman-Vaniman America

### Types of Materials:

- Articles
- Correspondence
- Diaries
- Photographs

### Names:

- Wellman, Arthur
- Wellman, Walter, 1858-1934

### Places:

- Arctic regions -- Discovery and exploration

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Correspondence, circa 1890-1921

Arrangement: Arranged in chronological order.

Box 1, Folder 1	[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman], [1890?]
Box 1, Folder 2	[Letter From Walter Wellman to His Family], April 26, 1894
Box 1, Folder 3	[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman], August 20, 1894
Box 1, Folder 4	[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman], July 10 [1896 or 1897]
Box 1, Folder 5	[Letter From Walter Wellman to His Family], April 12 [1898]
Box 1, Folder 6	[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman], July 1 [1898]
Box 1, Folder 7	[Letter From Evelyn B. Baldwin to Arthur Wellman], July 3, 1898
Box 1, Folder 8	[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman], July 16 [1898]
Box 1, Folder 9	[Letter From Walter Wellman to His Family], August 1 [1898]
Box 1, Folder 10	[Letter From Walter Wellman to His Daughters], August 2 [1898]
Box 1, Folder 11	[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman], August 2, 1898
Box 1, Folder 12	[Letter From Walter Wellman to Emma & Arthur Wellman], December 31, 1898
Box 1, Folder 13	[Instructions Regarding Ship from Walter Wellman to Aargaard], [1898]
Box 1, Folder 14	[Misc. Correspondence], 1889, 1899, 1921
Box 1, Folder 15	[Excerpt of a Letter Prof. Fridtjof Nansen to A. Aagaard Jan. 2, 1899]
Box 1, Folder 16	[Letters From A. Aagaard to Arthur Wellman & James Eckels], 20 & 24 Jan., 1899
Box 1, Folder 17	[Drafts of Correspondence], Feb. 1899
Box 1, Folder 18	[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman], Feb. 15, 1899
Box 1, Folder 19	Correspondence with Norwegian Government, April 15, 1899
Box 1, Folder 20	[Letter From Aagaard to Arthur Wellman & T.W. Stokes], April 22, 1899

Box 1, Folder 21 [\[Letter From Arthur Wellman to Emma Wellman\], May 24, 1909](#)

Box 1, Folder 22 [\[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman\], August 10, 1909](#)

Box 1, Folder 23 [\[Letter From Walter Wellman to Arthur Wellman\], undated](#)

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## Series 2: Miscellaneous, circa 1897-1934

Arrangement: Arranged in chronological order.

Box 1, Folder 24	<a href="#">[Expedition Proposal]</a> , <a href="#">[circa 1897]</a>
Box 1, Folder 25	<a href="#">[Life Insurance Information]</a> , March 16, 1898
Box 1, Folder 26, Box 2	<a href="#">[Financial Information]</a> , 1898-1899
Box 1, Folder 27	<a href="#">[Airship Fabric]</a> , 1909
Box 1, Folder 28	<a href="#">[Arthur Wellman's Notebook]</a> , 1909
Box 1, Folder 29	<a href="#">[Promotional Postcards]</a> , <a href="#">[1909?]</a> Notes: Contents of this folder have been scanned and catalogued previously and were assigned the following image numbers: NASM-9A10646 NASM-9A10682 - NASM-9A10683 NASM-9A10685 NASM-9A10703
Box 1, Folder 30, Box 2	<a href="#">[Newspaper Articles]</a> , 1930, 1931, 1934
Box 1, Folder 31	<a href="#">[ "To The Pole By Airship" by Walter Wellman]</a> , undated
Box 1, Folder 32	<a href="#">["Bear Story" &amp; Notes]</a> , undated
Box 1, Folder 33, Box 2	<a href="#">[Posters for Lecture Given by Arthur Wellman]</a> , undated

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## Series 3: Photographs &amp; Lantern Slides, 1885-1910

Arrangement: Arranged in chronological order, excepting the lantern slides which were placed at the end of the series.

Item level records exist for the photographs.

Box 1, Folder 34	<a href="#">[Family Photos &amp; Portraits], 1885-1910</a> Notes: Contents of this folder have been scanned and catalogued previously and were assigned the following image numbers:Contents of this folder have been scanned and catalogued previously and were assigned the following image numbers:  NASM-9A10729 - NASM-9A10730 NASM-9A10732 - NASM-9A10736
Box 1, Folder 35	<a href="#">[1898-1899 Wellman Polar Expedition], 1898-1899</a> Notes: Contents of this folder have been scanned and catalogued previously and were assigned the following image numbers:  NASM-9A10647 - NASM-9A10672 NASM-9A10679 - NASM-9A10680 NASM-9A10731
Box 1, Folder 36	<a href="#">[Portrait, Possibly of Walter Wellman], August 1899</a> Notes: Heavily retouched. Image was scanned and catalogued previously and assigned the following image number:  NASM-9A10673
Box 1, Folder 37	<a href="#">[1906-1909 Wellman Polar Expedition], 1906-1909</a> Notes: Contents of this folder have been scanned and catalogued previously and were assigned the following image numbers:  NASM-9A10684 NASM-9A10686 - NASM-9A10688 NASM-9A10691 - NASM-9A10694 NASM-9A10696 NASM-9A10698 - NASM-9A10700 NASM-9A10702 NASM-9A10704 NASM-9A10706 NASM-9A10709 - NASM-9A10714 NASM-9A10716
Box 1, Folder 38	<a href="#">[1909 Airship "America" Rescue Photographs], [August 15, 1909]</a> Notes: The Wellman-Vaniman airship "America" being towed back to Camp Wellman; seen from the deck of the Royal Norwegian Navy ship "Farm." Contents of this folder have been scanned and catalogued previously and were assigned the following image numbers:  NASM-9A10681 NASM-9A10695 NASM-9A10697 NASM-9A10705 NASM-9A10707 - NASM-9A10708
Box 3-6	<a href="#">[Lantern Slides]</a> 4 Boxes

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