



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Henry Wurtz Papers

NMAH.AC.0006

Robert Harding

1982

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Henry Wurtz Papers
Date:	1861-1885
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0006
Creator:	Wurtz, Henry, 1828-1910 (Author)
Source:	National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Physical Sciences (Collector)
Extent:	2 Cubic feet (5 boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Wurtz's scheme, presented in a report to the stockholders, was a new method for the dry distillation of non-caking coal to obtain liquid oils and paraffin. Included in this box are: the report to the stockholders of the Union Chemical Manufacturing Co., 1883; patent specifications, 1881; correspondence with the Patent Office, prospectus on coal distillation, 1885; a notebook of minutes from meetings of Union Chemical Manufacturing Co., 1881-1883.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Richard Wurtz (Litchfield, Connecticut).

Provenance

Collection transferred to the Archives Center from the Division of Physical Sciences (now the Division of Medicine and Science) April 5, 1983.

Separated Materials

2 glass plate negatives removed from collection and held in OIPP library with negative numbers 83-1890 & 83-1891.

Processing Information

Originally processed by Robert S. Harding, Ann Seeger, and Jeffrey Sturchio in March, 1982. Revised by Robert S. Harding, October, 1996. Second revision to finding aid by Sara Sterkenburg, April, 2013

Processing Information

Collection processed by Robert Harding, 1982

Preferred Citation

Henry Wurtz Papers, 1861-1885, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

Henry Wurtz (c. 1828-1910), chemist and editor, contributed to both the theory and practice of chemistry. He studied at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), where his interest in scientific pursuits was awakened by studies under Joseph Henry and John Torrey. Between 1854 and 1856 he was state chemist and geologist of the New Jersey Geological Survey. In 1858 he was appointed professor of chemistry and pharmacy at the National Medical College of Washington, D.C. (later George Washington University). During this connection he served as chemical examiner in the United States Patent Office. In 1861 in New York he opened a private laboratory for general consulting work. During the years 1877-1887 he was engaged in developing processes for increasing the yields of paraffin oils and other by products of the distillation of coal. He devoted the remaining years of his life to his private consulting practice and took out numerous patents relating to the distillation of paraffin hydrocarbons and other chemical products.

Opened a private laboratory in New York for general consulting work, 1861. During 1877-1887 developed processes for increasing yields of paraffin oils and other by-products of coal distillation. Devoted remaining years of his life to private consulting practice and received numerous patents relating to the distillation of paraffin hydrocarbons and other chemical products.

Scope and Contents

These papers include items concerning the Union Chemical Manufacturing Company, 1883-1885, on dry destructive distillation of coal to make liquid oils and paraffins, including: patent specifications, 1881; report to the stockholders of the Company, 1883; correspondence with the Patent Office; correspondence regarding the Company, 1883-1884; prospectus on coal distillation, 1885; and a notebook of minutes from meetings of the Company, 1881-1883.

Also included is material relating to Wurtz's interest in petroleum distillation, 1884-1885, consisting of newsclippings, contracts, proofs and galleries of prospectus, and correspondence with perspective investors. Also, correspondence with A.R. Leeds and F.W. Clarke and other chemists regarding Wurtz's desire to find a new assistant; "The Book of Inventions, made by Henry Wurtz from about 1850, Compilation and Arrangement, from Scattered Notes, Commenced in September 1861, by H.W."; a copy of a letter to Joseph Henry from Wurtz relating to warlike inventions, November 9, 1861; photographs of Wurtz family; certificate of membership in the Whig Society at the College of New Jersey (later, Princeton), 1848; and scientific instruments catalogues, 1882-1884.

Arrangement

Divided into six series: (1) Union Chemical Manufacturing Company, 1883-1885; (2) Petroleum Distillation and Miscellaneous Chemical Consulting, 1884-1885; (3) Book of Inventions, 1861; (4) Wurtz Biographical Material and Family Photographs; (5) Publications; (6) Whig Society Certificate, 1848.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Alkylation
- Chemical engineering -- Patents
- Coal liquefaction
- Distillation, Fractional
- Inventions -- United States -- History -- 19th century
- Petroleum, Synthetic

Types of Materials:

- Catalogs -- 1820-1910
- Certificates
- Correspondence -- 19th century
- Notebooks -- 1850-1900
- Photographs -- Black-and-white negatives -- Glass -- 19th century

Names:

- American Whig Society
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Physical Sciences
- Union Chemical Manufacturing Company
- Wurtz, Henry, 1828-1910

Container Listing

Series 1: Union Chemical Manufacturing Company, 1883 - 1885

Box 1

Creator: Wurtz, Henry, 1828-1910
Union Chemical Manufacturing Company
Language: English.
Names: Union Chemical Manufacturing Company
Topic: Alkylation
Petroleum, Synthetic
Fischer-Tropsch process
Coal liquefaction -- Patents
Coal
Chemistry -- 19th century
Chemical engineering -- Patents
Distillation, Fractional
Genre/Form: Minutes
Patents

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Series 2: Petroleum Distillation and Miscellaneous Chemical Consulting, 1884 - 1885

Box 2

Author: Wurtz, Henry, 1828-1910

Language: English.

Scope and Contents: This box contains material relating to Wurtz's interest in petroleum distillation, 1884-1885, and his attempt to market inventions for obtaining lubricants from petroleum distillates. Related material includes: correspondence with prospective investors, proofs and galleys for the prospectus, news clippings on petroleum, and various contracts.

The box also includes correspondence with A.R. Leeds, F.W. Clark and others regarding Wurtz's search for a new assistant, 1881, catalogs for scientific books and instruments, 1880's, and Wurtz's business card.

Correspondent: Clark, F.W.

Leeds, A.R.

Names: Wurtz, Henry, 1828-1910

Genre/Form: Catalogs -- 1820-1910

Contracts

clippings (information artifacts)

Business cards

Letters (correspondence) -- 1880-1890

Topic: Distillation, Fractional

Coal liquefaction

Petroleum, Synthetic

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Series 3: Book of Inventions, 1861

Box 3

Language: English.
Scope and Contents: "The Book of Inventions, Made by Henry Wurtz from about 1850, Compilation and Arrangement, from Scattered Notes, Commenced in September 1861, by H.W." This is a day book that includes brief descriptions of various subjects in the chemical arts. It includes a subject index. Slipped inside is a letter from Wurtz to Joseph Henry, dated November 9, 1861, relating to "warlike inventions."

The box also contains four copies of the book.

Genre/Form: Daybooks -- 1850-1860
Letters (correspondence) -- 1860-1870
Topic: Inventions -- United States -- History -- 19th century

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Series 4: Wurtz Biographical Material and Family Photographs, 1848 - 1891

Box 4, Folder 1-3

Language: English.

Depicted: Clark Wurtz, Augusta Harrison

Genre/Form: Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin -- 1850-1900

Photographs -- Black-and-white negatives -- Glass -- 19th century

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Series 5: Publications, 1733, 1878

Box 4, Folder 4-5

Author: Hart, Edward, 1854-
Arbuthnot, John, 1667-1735
Language: English.
Genre/Form: Publications
Articles

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Series 6: Whig Society Certificate, 1848

Box 5

Language: English.
Names: American Whig Society
Genre/Form: Certificates

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