



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Anglo-American Telegraph Company Records

NMAH.AC.0073

Robert S. Harding and Mumia Shimaka Mbasu

January 1986

Archives Center, National Museum of American History
P.O. Box 37012
Suite 1100, MRC 601
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012
Business Number: Phone: 202-633-3270
Fax Number: Fax: 202-786-2453
archivescenter@si.edu
<https://americanhistory.si.edu/archives>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical	2
Scope and Contents	3
Arrangement	4
Names and Subjects	
Container Listing	
Series 1: Corporate Records, 1862-1947	5
Series 2: Journals, 3/27/1866 - 6/1912	6
Series 3: Ledgers, 3/27/1866 - 3/31/1912	7
Series 4: Cash Books, 1904-12-01-1941-03-31	9
Series 5: Miscellaneous Records, 1866-1880	10

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Anglo-American Telegraph Company Records
Date:	1862-1947
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0073
Creator:	Anglo-American Telegraph Company, Ltd. (Creator)
Extent:	14 Cubic feet (51 volumes in 44 boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Records relating to the organization of the company, corporate and financial records. Corporate records include two volumes of the company's acts, charters, contracts and agreements, 1862-1883; minutes of board meetings relating to varied subjects, such as agreements between the company and other telegraph companies such as Western Union Telegraph concerning sales of property, details of transactions or purchases undertaken by the company. Financial records consist of nine volumes of "journals" showing monthly records of receipts, 1866-1912; nineteen volumes of ledgers reveal a detailed financial status of the company, 1866-1912; and nine volumes of cash books consist of the financial transactions of the company, 1904-early 1941. See also 1 folder of the Anglo-American Telegraph Company telegrams in the Warshaw Collection under the heading "Telegraphs".

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The initial collection was donated by the TransAtlantic Cable Limited, Bermuda in 1970.

Provenance

These records were transferred by the Division of Electricity (now the Division of Work and Industry) to the Archives Center on November 11, 1983.

Related Materials

Materials in the Archives Center

AC0205, Western Union Telegraph Company Records

Processing Information

The collection was processed by Robert S. Harding, archivist and Mumia Shimaka-Mbasu, January 1986.

Preferred Citation

Anglo-American Telegraph Company Records, 1862-1947, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Accruals

The Engineer's Final Report, 1880 was donated to the Archives Center by Edward Gallagher in April 1998. Items in Series 5: Miscellaneous Records were donated to the Archives Center by Western Union in June 1996.

Biographical / Historical

Anglo American Telegraph Company history begins in 1852 when the government of Newfoundland granted an English engineer, F.N. Crisborne, the exclusive right to land cables in Newfoundland for thirty years. This exclusive right was predicated on the condition that a land line be constructed across the country from St. Johns to Cape Ray. Work on the system started in 1852 with the laying of a cable across the Northumberland Strait and the commencement of the construction of the land line across Newfoundland.

The life of the cable was less than a year old and only forty miles of land line were completed before the company went bankrupt. On his visit to New York to raise more money for his company, Crisborne was introduced to Cyrus West Field (1819 1892), a retired American merchant. Field recognized the importance of Crisborne's concession in Newfoundland in connection with a proposed Atlantic cable, found a syndicate among his friends, and arranged for the extension of Crisborne's concession to fifty years from 1856. He then formed a new company called New York, Newfoundland and London Electric Telegraph Company.

On his visit to England at the end of 1854 to order a cable to span the Gulf of St. Lawrence between Cape Ray and Cape North, Field met John Watkins Brett, who, with his brother had been responsible for the first channel cable. Field also met Charles T. Bright of the Magnetic Company. Both Brett and Bright were convinced of the feasibility of an Atlantic cable. The formation of the Atlantic Telegraph Company on October 20, 1856, was a result of a meeting of Field, Brett and Bright. The new company attempted but failed in 1857 to successfully launch the first Atlantic cable due to financial difficulties, but plans were made immediately for a second attempt in 1858. In late 1858, the cable failed after passing 723 messages.

The Atlantic Telegraph Company did not go into liquidation for Field and Bright were still convinced that a working cable could be achieved. In the United States, Field aroused the interest of the board of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company who agreed to take a considerable amount of their payment for the manufacture and laying of a cable in shares of the Atlantic Telegraph Company. The promoters, and, principally, the board of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company, were not daunted by efforts to raise money for yet another attempt in spite of failures. A new company, the Anglo American Telegraph Company, was formed with the capital Atlantic Telegraph Company raised. This new company took over the New York, Newfoundland and London Telegraph Company until 1873 when the two companies amalgamated under the name Anglo American Telegraph Company, Ltd. Anglo American Telegraph Company operated in part as an agent of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company. But the joint efforts of the two companies effected the completion of the cable in 1866 between London and New York.

During the pioneering years of cable construction, the British cable industry designed, manufactured and laid all major submarine cables. Britain possessed the technology, the necessary capital and the extensive overseas interests fundamental to an ambitious effort in cable expansion. Besides, Britain depended on the cooperation of the European states for external telegraphic communications. The British themselves were, however, familiar and

experienced in dealing with large engineering projects, such as railways and other similar ventures. An added advantage for the British was an excess of investment capital in the United Kingdom.

In the United States, similar factors either were absent or did not work to Cyrus Field's advantage. Field was unable to secure the support of prominent American businessmen. Samuel Morse (1791 1872), best remembered for his work on the telegraph and as one of the first Americans to make telegraph commercially viable, was the only prominent scientist who supported the project in the United States. Unlike Britain where it was easier to obtain government support through informal tactics, in the United States, Field had to submit a bill in the Congress. Obtaining support from Congress for the project was a difficult task, especially since the cable joined the two British territories. In addition, there was little precedent for United States government support for large engineering projects, particularly the ones that had an international dimension.

The United States government support for the cable project came largely from Field's unabating conviction that the cable should be an international project and from the expectation of the British government that the United States would provide a guarantee similar to the one Britain had granted: to link North America and Britain by cable. Through the help of William H. Seward (1801 1872) who served as Secretary of State (1860 1869) and favored American expansionism, Cyrus Field's idea of constructing American cable in the Atlantic Ocean to Britain received government support. In fact, Seward favored plans for the United States to also construct cables in the Pacific or Caribbean regions.

Following passage of the bill in Congress, the directors and officers of Atlantic Telegraph Company met to settle the question of how to proceed. As a result of proper planning and hard work, successful functioning of the cable came in 1866, after three failed attempts to launch a cable: 1856 1857, 1858 and 1864 1865. The 1866 success came as a result of the Atlantic Telegraph Company board listening to the views of engineers and electricians who expressed optimism. The board shared the confidence of their technicians. Consequently the board made the decision to raise money to build a new cable, as well as use the material from the previous cable project of 1865.

The Anglo American, as an agent of Atlantic Telegraph Company lay and operated cables. In return, it received 125,000 English pounds annually from Atlantic Telegraph revenues and another 25,000 English pounds annually from revenues of New York, Newfoundland, and London Company a twenty five percent return. The cable laying work began at Valentia Bay on July 13, 1866. By September 8, 1866, Atlantic cable was operating.

The major part of the 1866 cable was renewed by the telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company. The Construction and Maintenance Company and the Western Union Company reached an agreement in 1911 whereby from 1912, the latter company would lease all the Anglo American cable for ninety nine years. Since 1912, all new cables laid in conjunction with the joint system were the property of the Western Union Telegraph Company.

Western Union Telegraph Company terminated the lease prematurely in 1963. The Anglo American Telegraph Company received a substantial payment as compensation. The ownership and operation of the company was solved by forming a new company, Transatlantic Cables Limited, with their offices in Bermuda.

Scope and Contents

These records consist of material relating to the organization of the company, corporate and financial records. Corporate records include two (2) volumes of the company's acts, charters, contracts and agreements from 1862 to 1883; minutes of board meetings relating to varied subjects, such as agreements between the company and other telegraph companies such as Western Union Telegraph concerning sales of property, details of transactions or purchases undertaken by the company.

Financial records consist of nine (9) volumes of "journals" showing monthly records of receipts for 1866 to 1912; nineteen (19) volumes of ledgers reveal a detailed financial status of the company for the years 1866 1912; and nine (9) volumes of cash books consist of the financial transactions of the company between 1904 and early 1941.

Miscellaneous Records in series 5 include the Log Book of the Heart's Content Station from 1866-1867; printed correspondence from William Orton, president of Western Union, to the company; the company's general orders, 1880; and the Engineer's Final Report, 1880.

References

- K.R. Haigh. *Cableships and Submarine Cables*. London: Adlard Coles Ltd., 1968, esp. Chapter 39.
- Vary T. Coales and Bernard Finn. *A Retrospective Technology Assessment: Submarine Telegraph; Transatlantic Cable of 1866*. San Francisco Press Inc., 1979.
- Charles Bright. *Submarine Telegraphs: Their History, Construction, and Working*. London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1898.
- Susan Schlee. *The Edge of Unfamiliar World: A History of Oceanography*. New York: Putnam, 1968.
- Samuel Carter. *Cyrus Field: A Man of Two Worlds*. New York: Putnam, 1968.
- Henry M. Field. *The Story of the Atlantic Telegraphy*. New York: Scribner, 1892.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into five series and within each series arranged chronologically.

Series 1: Corporate Records, 1862-1947

Series 2: Journals, 1866-1912

Series 3: Ledgers, 1866-1912

Series 4: Cash Books, 1904-1941

Series 5: Miscellaneous Records, 1866-1880

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Atlantic telegraph cable
- Communications
- Submarine telegraphy
- Telegraph, Wireless

Types of Materials:

- Cashbooks -- 1900-1950
- Journals -- 1860-1920
- Ledgers -- 1860-1920
- Minute books

Names:

- Western Union Telegraph Company

Container Listing

Series 1: Corporate Records, 1862-1947

Box 1 (Series 1)	Acts, Charters, Contracts and Agreements; Volume I, 1862-1883
Box 1 (Series 1)	Acts, Charters, Contracts and Agreements;: Volume II, 1862-1883
Box 2 (Series 1), Volume 1	Minute Book, 2/20/1866 - 10/ 7/1867
Box 2 (Series 1), Volume 1	Minute Book, 2/26/1873 - 6/26/1873
Box 2 (Series 1), Volume 1	Miscellaneous Minutes, 4/1873 - 6/1873
Box 3 (Series 1), Volume 3	Miscellaneous Minutes, 1/ 3/1879 - 10/24/1890
Box 4 (Series 1), Volume 4	Miscellaneous Minutes, 11/ 7/1890 - 3/ 3/1899
Box 5 (Series 1), Volume 5	Miscellaneous Minutes, 3/17/1899 - 3/ 9/1906
Box 6 (Series 1), Volume 6	Miscellaneous Minutes, 3/23/1906 - 11/13/1914
Box 7 (Series 1), Volume 7	Miscellaneous Minutes, 12/11/1914- 5/22/1925
Box 8 (Series 1), Volume 8	Miscellaneous Minutes, 6/19/1925 - 10/17/1935
Box 9 (Series 1), Volume 9	Miscellaneous Minutes, 1/21/1935 - 7/23/1947

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Journals, 3/27/1866 - 6/1912

Box 1 (Series 2), Volume 1	Journal, 1866-03-27-1868-04-30
Box 2 (Series 2), Volume 2	Journal, 1868-06-30-1870-01-31
Box 2 (Series 2), Volume 3	Journal, 1871-01-31-1878-12
Box 2 (Series 2), Volume 4	Journal, 1884-1899
Box 3 (Series 2), Volume 5	Journal, 1885-01-1890-06
Box 3 (Series 2), Volume 6	Journal, 1890-06-1893-12
Box 4 (Series 2), Volume 7	Journal, 1894-01-1897-06
Box 4 (Series 2), Volume 8	Journal, 1897-07-1900-12
Box 5 (Series 2), Volume 9	Journal, 1901-01-1904-06
Box 5 (Series 2), Volume 10	Journal, 1904-07-1907-12
Box 6 (Series 2), Volume 11	Journal, 1907-12-1911-06
Box 6 (Series 2), Volume 12	Journal, 1911-06-1912-03

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Ledgers, 3/27/1866 - 3/31/1912

Box 1 (Series 3), Volume 1	Ledgers, 1866-03-27-1867-07-27
Box 1 (Series 3), Volume 2	Ledgers, 1867-07-27-1868-05-01
Box 2 (Series 3), Volume 3	Ledgers, 1868-04-30-1869-10-31
Box 3 (Series 3), Volume 4	Ledgers, 1870-11-15-1872-12-31
Box 4 (Series 3), Volume 5	Ledgers, 1873-01-01-1873-05-31
Box 5 (Series 3), Volume 6	Ledgers, 1874-12-31-1876-12-31
Box 6 (Series 3), Volume 7	Ledgers, 1877-06-30-1878-06-30
Box 7 (Series 3), Volume 8	Ledgers, 1878-12-31-1880-12-31
Box 8 (Series 3), Volume 9	Ledgers, 1881-01-25-1883-12-31
Box 9 (Series 3), Volume 10	Ledgers, 1884-01-17-1886-12-31
Box 10, Volume 11	Ledgers, 1887-01-01-1889-12-31
Box 11, Volume 12	Ledgers, 1890-01-02-1891-12-31
Box 12, Volume 13	Ledgers, 1892-01-10-1894-12-31
Box 13, Volume 14	Ledgers, 1895-01-11-1897-12-31
Box 14, Volume 15	Ledgers, 1898-01-11-1900-12-31
Box 15, Volume 16	Ledgers, 1901-01-01-1903-12-31
Box 16, Volume 17	Ledgers, 1904-01-01-1906-12-31
Box 17, Volume 18	Ledgers, 1907-01-01-1909-12-31

Series 3: Ledgers

Anglo-American Telegraph Company Records
NMAH.AC.0073

Box 18, Volume 19 Ledgers, 1910-01-01-1912-03-31

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Cash Books, 1904-12-01-1941-03-31

Box 1 (Series 4),
Volume 26

Cash Books, 1904-12-01-1905-10-01

Box 2 (Series 4),
Volume 27

Cash Books, 1905-10-27-1906-09-29

Box 3 (Series 4),
Volume 28

Cash Books, 1906-09-08-1907-07-08

Box 4 (Series 4),
Volume 31

Cash Books, 1909-03-18-1910-02-04

Box 5 (Series 4),
Volume 32

Cash Books, 1910-02-02-1910-12-24

Box 6 (Series 4),
Volume 33

Cash Books, 1910-12-09-1911-10-14

Box 7 (Series 4),
Volume 34

Cash Books, 1911-10-14-1912-03-05

Box 8 (Series 4),
Volume 35

Cash Books, 1912-04-01-1923-09-28

Box 9 (Series 4),
Volume 36

Cash Books, 1924-04-01-1941-03-31

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Miscellaneous Records, 1866-1880

Box 1 (Series 5),
Volume 1

Log Book of Heart's Content Station, 1866-1867

Box 1 (Series 5),
Volume 2

Reprint of letter and related correspondence, From William Orton (President of Western Union Telegraph Company) to the Chairman and Directors of the Anglo-American Telegraph Company, 1877 January 5

Box 1 (Series 5),
Volume 3

General Orders, Rules and Regulations for the Anglo-American Telegraph Company, 1880

Box 1 (Series 5),
Volume 4

Engineer's Final Report, 1880

[Return to Table of Contents](#)