



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Charles Atlas Records

NMAH.AC.0654

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2005

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

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|--------------------|--|
| Repository: | Archives Center, National Museum of American History |
| Title: | Charles Atlas Records |
| Date: | circa 1909-1998 |
| Identifier: | NMAH.AC.0654 |
| Creator: | Atlas, Charles, 1893-1972 |
| Extent: | 3 Cubic feet (9 boxes, 1 map folder) |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | Collection consists primarily of educational, promotional and publicity materials created by Charles Atlas and others for his bodybuilding business. |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Charles Atlas, Ltd. president Jeffrey C. Hogue donated the collection to the National Museum of American History, Archives Center on April 23, 1998.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Erin Podolsky, 2005.

Preferred Citation

Charles Atlas Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

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Biographical / Historical

Charles Atlas was born Angelo Siciliano in 1893 in Italy and immigrated to New York as a young boy with his family. After failing to build up his body using weight-training equipment, he stumbled upon the concept of resistance exercise – pitting one muscle against another to build strength – during a visit to the Prospect Park Zoo in Brooklyn, and soon turned himself into a muscular beauty. He got his start in physical culture demonstrating exercise equipment and working as a circus strongman, ripping telephone books in half and performing other feats of strength. He later found work as an artists' model, becoming one of the most sought after models in the country, and was chosen as "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" in 1922 by Physical Culture magazine.

For the next several years, Atlas tried to capitalize on his title by composing a multi-lesson, mail-order bodybuilding course that emphasized both exercise and clean living, physically and mentally. However, he turned out to be a poor businessperson and did not find much success. It was not until Atlas met advertising man Charles P. Roman in 1928, who named the system "Dynamic-Tension" and came up with the "97-pound weakling" marketing concept for which Atlas remains famous, that the correspondence course began to take off. With Roman as his business partner, Atlas became a ubiquitous presence on the backs of comic books and in the minds of scrawny boys everywhere, promising strength and manliness to all who successfully completed his program. The pair sold the course to millions of students worldwide, many of whom wrote Atlas to thank him for changing their lives. They sold several other products, including vitamins and a ten-volume encyclopedia called the Sexual Education Series. Roman bought out Atlas's half of the business in 1970 and sold Charles Atlas, Ltd., to Jeffrey C. Hogue in 1997. The company continues to operate, selling the Dynamic-Tension course, licensed apparel and other items, and nutritional supplements.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists primarily of educational, promotional and publicity materials created by Charles Atlas and others for his bodybuilding business. There is some information about Atlas's personal life including a biography, newspaper clippings and photographs of him throughout his life and of his family. The materials are useful in understanding health, physical culture, body training and self-esteem issues for males in American society during the first half of the twentieth century.

Arrangement

The collection is divided into four series.

Series 1, Educational Materials, circa 1920s-1998, undated

Series 2, Publicity Materials, 1936-1998, undated

Series 3, Promotional Materials, 1936-1998, undated

Series 4, Photographs, circa 1909-1998, undated

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Bodybuilding
Masculinity

Types of Materials:

Business records -- 20th century
Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin -- 19th-20th century

Container Listing

Series 1: Educational Materials, circa 1920s-1998, undated

Scope and Contents: Series 1, Educational Materials, circa 1920s-1998, undated, consists of course materials sent to Charles Atlas students, including complete course booklets and week-by-week lessons. Versions of individual lessons and complete courses sent to students range from sparsely annotated, typewritten originals to published versions that remained relatively unchanged over the years. There is a paperback version of the ten-volume Sexual Education Series encyclopedia published by Charles Atlas, Ltd., in 1928.

| | |
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| Box 1, Folder 1 | Dynamic-Tension course, 1940 |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Dynamic-Tension course, circa 1969 |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Dynamic-Tension course, circa 1996 |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Dynamic-Tension course Spanish, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Lesson one, circa 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | Lesson one copy, circa 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | Lesson one Eyes, circa 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | Lesson one Eyes, copy, 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | Lesson one Face, 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | Lesson one Face copy, 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Lesson one Hair and Scalp, 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | Lesson one Hair and Scalp copy, 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 13 | Lesson one, pre-1940 |
| Box 1, Folder 14 | Lesson one, post-1940 |
| Box 1, Folder 15 | Lesson one-three Dynamic-Tension pictorial examples, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 16 | Lesson two addition, 1945 |
| Box 1, Folder 17 | Lesson four, circa 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 18 | Lesson four copy, circa 1920s |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 19 | Lesson four Dynamic-Tension pictorial examples, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 20 | Lesson five Dynamic-Tension pictorial examples, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 21 | Lesson six, circa 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 22 | Lesson six, circa 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 23 | Lesson six copy, circa 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 24 | Lesson six copy, circa 1920s |
| Box 1, Folder 25 | Lesson six Dynamic-Tension pictorial examples, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 1 | Lesson seven, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 2 | Lesson seven copy, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 3 | Lesson eight Lower Leg, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 4 | Lesson eight Shoulders, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 5 | Lesson eight copy, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 6 | Lesson eight copy, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | Lesson eight Dynamic-Tension pictorial examples, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 8 | Lesson nine, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 9 | Lesson nine copy, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 10 | Lesson nine Dynamic-Tension pictorial examples, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 11 | Lesson ten Dynamic-Tension pictorial examples, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 12 | Lesson eleven Wrists and Fingers, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 13 | Lesson eleven Wrists and Fingers copy, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 14 | Lesson eleven Dynamic-Tension pictorial examples, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 14 | Lesson twelve Dynamic-Tension Methods for Acquiring Physical Magnetism of Special Importance, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 15 | Lesson 15, circa 1920s |
| Box 2, Folder 16 | Lesson 15 copy, circa 1920s |

Box 2, Folder 17 "How to Develop a Big Powerful Chest" Fragments of Lesson

Box 2, Folder 18 "How to Gain Weight"

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Series 2: Publicity Materials, 1936-1995; undated

Scope and Contents: Series 2, Publicity Materials, 1936-1995, undated, consists of information about Charles Atlas and Charles Atlas, Ltd. Newspaper clippings are arranged in chronological order, while magazines are arranged in alphabetical order. There is also one folder of popular culture references to Atlas.

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|---------------------|---|
| Box 2, Folder 19 | Adventure, 1954 August |
| Box 2, Folder 20 | Action-Packed Western, 1955 May |
| Box 2, Folder 21 | National Enquirer, 1969 October 19 |
| Box 2, Folder 22 | New Yorker The., 1942 January 3 |
| Box 2, Folder 23 | Newsweek, 1962 February 12 |
| Box 2, Folder 24 | Newsweek, 1966 March 14 |
| Box 2, Folder 25 | Official Detective Stories, 1975 July |
| Box 2, Folder 26 | Reader's Digest, 1958 September |
| Box 2, Folder 27 | Real, 1963 October |
| Box 2, Folder 28 | Sports Afield, 1976 March |
| Box 3, Folder 1 | Sports Illustrated, 1959 August 3 |
| Box 3, Folder 2 | Sports Illustrated, 1968 November 25 |
| Box 3, Folder 3 | Sports Illustrated, 1979 June 11 |
| Box 3, Folder 4 | Time, 1964 February 14 |
| Box 3, Folder 5 | True, 1975 February |
| Box 3, Folder 6 | Winged Foot The, 1962 November |
| Box 3, Folder 7 | Popular Culture References |
| Box 3, Folder 8 | Newspaper clippings, 1936 January |
| Box 3, Folder 9 | Newspaper clippings, 1936 October |
| Box 3, Folder 10-13 | Newspaper clippings, 1938 April–July |
| Box 3, Folder 14-15 | Newspaper clippings, 1938 September–October |

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|---------------------|---|
| Box 3, Folder 16-24 | Newspaper clippings, 1939 January–September |
| Box 4, Folder 1 | Newspaper clippings, 1940 April |
| Box 4, Folder 2-3 | Newspaper clippings, 1945 October–November |
| Box 4, Folder 4 | Newspaper clippings, 1946 April |
| Box 4, Folder 5 | Newspaper clippings, 1956 July |
| Box 4, Folder 6 | Newspaper clippings, 1964 October |
| Box 4, Folder 7 | Newspaper clippings, 1966 November |
| Box 4, Folder 8 | Newspaper clippings, 1997 September |
| Box 4, Folder 9 | Newspaper clippings, undated |

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Series 3: Promotional Materials, 1936-1998; undated

Scope and Contents: Series 3, Promotional Materials, 1936-1998, undated, consists of materials produced by Charles Atlas, Ltd., and others that ultimately promoted the company and its products. It contains periodicals (including magazines and comic books) which include Atlas advertisements, mailings sent to Atlas students touting the Super Avityl vitamin, documents used by the company to request payment of delinquent bills, and other marketing materials. Materials labeled "non-Atlas" were not produced by or about Charles Atlas, Ltd., but remain of contextual interest. There is also a biography of Atlas based on the recollections of Charles Roman.

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| Box 4, Folder 10 | Yours in Perfect Manhood Charles Atlas biography |
| Box 4, Folder 11 | Image of Charles Atlas grave |
| Box 4, Folder 12 | Advertisements for comic books |
| Box 4, Folder 13 | Advertisements for comic books in Spanish language |
| Box 4, Folder 14 | Advertisements for Boys' Life, 1992 November and 1992 December |
| Box 4, Folder 15 | Advertisements for Boys' Life, 1998 April |
| Box 4, Folder 16 | Advertisements for Mechanix Illustrated, 1971 December |
| Box 4, Folder 17 | Advertisements for Physical Culture 1940 May |
| Box 4, Folder 18 | Advertisements for Saga, 1964 December |
| Box 4, Folder 19 | Formula 7 advertisements, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 20 | Vitamins Super Avityl advertisements, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 21 | Charles Atlas Supra Supplements Advertisements |
| Box 4, Folder 22 | Advertisements, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 23 | Advertising proof, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 24 | Advertising proof in German |
| Box 4, Folder 25 | Atlas Ltd. materials in Spanish |
| Box 4, Folder 26 | Licensing, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 27 | Atlas Ltd. debt collection |
| Box 4, Folder 28 | Other materials sold by Atlas Company |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Box 4, Folder 29 | Advertisements letters lessons certificate and membership card, 1998 |
| Box 4, Folder 30 | Charles Atlas Ltd. today, 1997-1998 |
| Map-folder 1 | You Can Be a New Man The Charles Atlas Way, 1989 1 Poster |
| Box 5, Folder 1 | Non-Atlas catalogs |
| Box 5, Folder 2 | Non-Atlas Joe Bonomo |
| Box 5, Folder 3 | Non-Atlas Muscular Development Book by Earle E. Liederman |
| Box 5, Folder 4 | Flip books, 1936 |
| Box 5, Folder 5 | Mailings, 1998 |
| Box 5, Folder 6 | Miscellaneous Charles Atlas Ltd. Mailings |
| Box 5, Folder 7 | Unopened mailing undated |
| Box 5, Folder 8 | Miscellaneous promotional materials |
| Box 5, Folder 9 | Membership cards, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 10 | Championship certificates, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 11 | Testimonial letters of artists, June-September 1922 |
| Box 5, Folder 12 | Testimonial of Alois P. Swoboda, 1937 |
| Box 5, Folder 13 | Transcripts of Radio Programs, 1947 |
| Box 5, Folder 14 | Responses to students Spanish materials |
| Box 5, Folder 15 | Application for Brazil in Portuguese |
| Box 5, Folder 16 | Letterhead stationery |
| Box 5, Folder 16 | <p>Everlasting Health and Strength : My Secret of Dynamic Tension [Booklet], 1939 1 Item (Ink / Silver gelatin on paper.) Image(s) Image(s): "Everlasting Strength and Health" Author: Atlas, Charles, 1893-1972 Notes: 00065401.tif (AC Scan No.: cover of booklet) Located in box 5. An early version of Atlas's training manual. The cover image depicts the author, nude.</p> |

Poor condition; losses on all four corners, especially lower left. Another copy of this booklet in the collection is in better condition.

Topic: Masculinity
Nudity
Bodybuilding
Genre/Form: Books -- 1930-1940

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|------------------|---|
| Box 5, Folder 17 | Dynamic-Tension booklets annotated with changes, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 18 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 19 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, 1941 |
| Box 5, Folder 20 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, 1950 |
| Box 5, Folder 21 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, 1956 |
| Box 5, Folder 22 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, 1959 |
| Box 5, Folder 23 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, 1971 |
| Box 5, Folder 24 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, 1973 |
| Box 5, Folder 25 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, 1976 |
| Box 5, Folder 26 | Dynamic-Tension booklets, 1981 |
| Box 5, Folder 27 | Dynamic-Tension booklets British publications |
| Box 5, Folder 28 | Dynamic-Tension booklets French publications |
| Box 5, Folder 29 | French materials to accompany Dynamic-Tension booklets |
| Box 5, Folder 30 | Dynamic-Tension booklets German publications |
| Box 5, Folder 31 | Dynamic-Tension booklets Spanish publications, 1948-1956; undated |
| Box 6, Folder 1 | Sex and Family Through the Ages, 1928 |
| Box 6, Folder 2 | Sex and Society, 1928 |
| Box 6, Folder 3 | Sexual Education of the Young Woman, 1928 |
| Box 6, Folder 4 | Sexual Education of the Young Man, 1928 |
| Box 6, Folder 5 | Love Courtship Marriage, 1928 |
| Box 6, Folder 6 | Mother and Baby, 1928 |

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| Box 6, Folder 7 | Companionate Marriage Birth Control Divorce Modern Home Life, 1928 |
| Box 6, Folder 8 | Sexual Life of Men and Women After Forty, 1928 |
| Box 6, Folder 9 | Diseases and Problems of Old Age, 1928 |
| Box 6, Folder 10 | Sexual Diseases and Abnormalities, 1928 |
| Box 7, Folder 1 | Samples of championship certificates |
| Box 7, Folder 2 | Scrapbook, 1936-1946 |
| Box 7, Folder 3 | Photographs |
| Box 7, Folder 4 | Esquire, April 1970 |
| Box 7, Folder 5 | Life, 1949 February 21; 1964 May 4; 1964 May 8, |
| Box 7, Folder 6 | Look, 1955 October 18; |
| Box 7, Folder 1 | Blue pencil sketch in wood frame by Everett Whillock 1942 |
| Box 7, Folder 2 | Diploma of completion of the Charles Atlas System of Health Strength and Personality Building awarded to V. Boff, 1936 April 7 |
| Box 7, Folder 3 | Color cartoon advertisement, 1997 |

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Series 4: Photographs, 1909-1998; undated

Scope and Contents: Series 4, Photographs, circa 1909-1998, undated, documents Atlas throughout his life, from the time he was a popular artists' model to old age. The materials are arranged alphabetically by subject.

| | |
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| Box 9, Folder 1 | Atlas as a young man |
| Box 9, Folder 2 | Atlas as a middle-aged man |
| Box 9, Folder 3 | Atlas later in life |
| Box 9, Folder 4 | Atlas beach set-up studio |
| Box 9, Folder 5 | Atlas posing in white trunks |
| Box 9, Folder 6 | Atlas posing in leopard skin trunks |
| Box 9, Folder 7 | Atlas with boxers |
| Box 9, Folder 8 | Atlas with celebrities |
| Box 9, Folder 9 | Atlas with children |
| Box 9, Folder 10 | Atlas with family |
| Box 9, Folder 11 | Atlas with Fred Allen |
| Box 9, Folder 12 | Atlas with golfers |
| Box 9, Folder 13 | Atlas with Jesse Jones and Owen D. Young |
| Box 9, Folder 14 | Atlas with unidentified people |
| Box 9, Folder 15 | Students |
| Box 9, Folder 16 | Atlas WMCA |
| Box 9, Folder 17 | Atlas Advertising |
| Box 9, Folder 18 | Mr. Roman |
| Box 9, Folder 19 | Mr. Roman and Mr. Hogue |
| Box 9, Folder 20 | Atlas and Mr. Roman |
| Box 9, Folder 21 | Atlas and nudes |

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|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Box 9, Folder 22 | Atlas – Feats of Strength |
| Box 9, Folder 23 | Atlas giving awards to others |
| Box 9, Folder 24 | Atlas Summer Camp |
| Box 9, Folder 25 | Atlas teaching |
| Box 9, Folder 26 | Atlas doing sports |
| Box 9, Folder 27 | Atlas in his office |
| Box 9, Folder 28 | S.S. Paris Charles Atlas and Group |
| Box 9, Folder 29 | Atlas with plane |

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