



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of American History*  
*Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the Charles Atlas Records

NMAH.AC.0654

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## Collection Overview

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

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## 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.

### Conditions Governing Use

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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.

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## 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.

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## 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

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## Container Listing

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

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.

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

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.

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
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

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.

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

Box o/s 1	Poster for training course,
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	Everlasting Health and Strength : My Secret of Dynamic Tension [Booklet], 1939 <i>1 Item</i> <a href="#">Image(s): Everlasting Health and Strength : My Secret of Dynamic Tension [Booklet].</a> <a href="#">Image(s): "Everlasting Strength and Health"</a> Atlas, Charles, 1893-1972, Author An early version of Atlas's training manual. The cover image depicts the author, nude.  Located in box 5.  Unrestricted research access on site by appointment.  Ink / Silver gelatin on paper.  Poor condition; losses on all four corners, especially lower left. Another copy of this booklet in the collection is in better condition.

## Local Numbers

00065401.tif (AC Scan No.: cover of booklet)

Topic:           Bodybuilding  
                  Masculinity  
                  Nudity

Genre/Form:   Books -- 1930-1940

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
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

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.

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
Box 9, Folder 22	Atlas – Feats of Strength
Box 9, Folder 23	Atlas giving awards to others
Box 9, Folder 24	Atlas Summer Camp

[Image\(s\)](#)

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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