



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Donald M. Burmister Papers

NMAH.AC.1068

Alison Oswald

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Donald M. Burmister Papers
Date:	1927-1974
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1068
Creator:	Burmister, Donald, 1895-1981
Source:	National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Mechanical and Civil Engineering
Extent:	5.5 Cubic feet (14 boxes)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Ownership and Custodial History

Donated to the National Museum of History and Technology (now the National Museum of American History) by Donald Burmister.

Provenance

Transferred to the Archives Center from Division of Work and Industry, 2007.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Kendall McKinley, intern, and Alison Oswald, archivist, 2022.

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Biographical Note

Born in Arizona in 1895, Donald M. Burmister emerged as a valuable contributor to the field of civil engineering during his career as a consulting engineer and university professor. After being drafted for service in the first World War, Burmister enlisted in the American military between 1918 and 1919. He later earned his B.A. (1926), B.S.(1927), C.E.(1928), and PhD (1938) from Columbia University pioneering achievements in the fields of civil engineering and soil mechanics. Burmister taught civil engineering at Columbia University from 1928-1963, specializing in soil mechanics and foundational engineering. He died in 1981 in Calhoun, Michigan at the age of 86.

Scope and Contents Note

Collection consists primarily of reports, prepared by Burmister, relating to consulting projects concerning beach erosion, building and bridge foundations, airports, highways, docks, piers, bulkheads, and land development. Most of the reports were prepared under the Soil Mechanics Laboratory, Columbia University. The laboratory was established by Burmister in 1933 as one of the first soil mechanics laboratories in the United States. It is now equipped with several unique apparatuses for advanced soil testing and research.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into two series.

Series 1: Projects, 1934-1966

Series 2: Publications and Writings, 1927-1974

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Airports
- Beach erosion
- Civil engineering
- Civil engineers
- Docks
- Engineering
- Foundations
- Piers
- Roads
- Roads -- Design and construction
- Soil mechanics

Types of Materials:

- Articles
- Correspondence -- 20th century
- Diagrams
- Photographs -- 20th century
- Reports
- Specifications

Names:

National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Mechanical and Civil Engineering

Container Listing

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Box 8, Folder 4	Greenwich-Kingsley Expressway (SM-190), 1955-1956
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Box 8, Folder 6	New York Navy Yard, Brooklyn (SM-196), 1955
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Box 13, Folder 9	Beach Erosion Studies (SM-356), 1956 Notes: Includes notes written by Burmister asking "What can and should be done now to really save America's priceless beaches?" 1968. Burmister authored a paper titled "Beach Erosion and Protection Problems," 1974 in which he addresses how to work with nature, beach building processes, eroding headlands and nature's replenishing processes.
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Box 14, Folder 4	Goodyear Deflection Stresses Performances, Tension , undated
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Box 14, Folder 6	Hempstead, New York, Reclamation and Development of Marsh Lands for Residential and Industrial Purposes, 1974
Box 14, Folder 7	Influence Diagrams for Stresses and Displacements in a Two Layer Pavement System for Airfields, Department of Navy, Washington, DC , 1965
Box 14, Folder 8	Influence Methods, undated
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