



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Records, 1926-1930, 1954-1988

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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu |
| Title: | Records |
| Identifier: | Record Unit 383 |
| Date: | 1926-1930, 1954-1988 |
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| Language: | English |

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 383, National Museum of American History.
Division of Armed Forces History, Records

Historical Note

The Division of Naval History was created in 1881 as part of the Section of Historical Collections, later the Division of History, which reported to the Department of Arts and Industries as well as the Department of Anthropology within the United States National Museum until 1938. In 1939, when the Division of History was established and began reporting to the Department of Engineering and Industries, Naval History was transferred to its control. The Division of History became the Department of History in 1949. In 1957, the Division became the Department of Armed Forces History which included the Divisions of Naval History and Military History and came under the supervision of the Museum of History and Technology (MHT).

In 1969, the Department of Armed Forces History became the Department of National and Military History and, in 1978, the Department of National History. In 1980, the Division of Naval History reported to the Department of the History of Science and Technology. The Division of Naval History and the Division of Military History merged in 1985 to form the Division of Armed Forces History.

The main purpose of the Division of Naval History was to trace the historical development of the United States Navy, beginning with maritime operations during the colonial and Revolutionary War period through subsequent years of change leading to the advent of the modern navy. Research mainly focused on United States naval personnel, vessels, weapons, uniforms, insignia, navigational instruments, and flags. The Division was also involved in staff marine archeology, publishing biographies, attending conferences, and collecting maritime artifacts. Curators and staff of the Division included Mendel L. Peterson, Acting Curator, 1958-1960; Philip K. Lundeborg, Associate Curator, 1959-1961, Curator, 1962-1986, and Curator Emeritus, 1987- ; Melvin H. Jackson, Associate Curator, 1962-1965; Harold D. Langley, Curator, 1969- ; and Lee Houchins, Research Associate, 1978-1984.

Descriptive Entry

These records include correspondence and memoranda documenting research activities, planning exhibitions for the Hall of Naval History, construction of ship models such as the USS Constitution, arrangements for acquiring the gunboat Philadelphia, studies of the submarine Nautilus and the Sperry Gyro-compass, presentation in 1965 of Sir Francis Drake's Cadiz Letter to the National Museum of History and Technology (NMHT), and involvement with the restoration of the USS Constellation. The records also consist of administrative files of the Division, public inquiries, blueprints for the Hall of Naval History, exhibition scripts, and photographs of ship models, naval vessels, exhibitions, and staff.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Historical museums
- Military history
- Military museums
- Museum curators
- Museum exhibits
- Naval history

Types of Materials:

- Black-and-white photographs
- Floor plans
- Illustrations
- Manuscripts

Names:

- Constellation (Frigate)
- Constitution (Frigate)
- Drake, Francis, 1540?-1596
- Houchins, Lee
- Jackson, Melvin H.
- Langley, Harold D.
- Lundeberg, Philip K.
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Department of Social and Cultural History
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Department of the History of Science and Technology
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Naval History
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Hall of Naval History
- Nautilus (Submarine : SS-73)
- Peterson, Mendel
- Philadelphia (Gunboat)
- Sperry Gyrocompass
- United States National Museum. Section of Historical Relics
- United States. Navy

Container Listing

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| Box 1 of 11 | Lectures: General Victor Krulak, 1969 [includes portraits] |
| Box 1 of 11 | Lectures: Mendel L. Peterson, 1966 |
| Box 1 of 11 | Lectures: Captain Roger Pinean, 1968 |
| Box 1 of 11 | Lectures: Captain S.W. Roskill, 1965 [includes photographs] |
| Box 1 of 11 | Move to Museum of History and Technology, 1961-1964 [includes photographs of museum] |
| Box 1 of 11 | Museum Computer Network: Stony Brook, 1974 |
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- Box 2 of 11 Scripts: An Era of Naval Decline
- Box 2 of 11 Scripts: The Rise of the New Navy (2 folders)
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- Box 5 of 11 John McCusker, 1965
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| Box 9 of 11 | Great Seaports (TV Project), 1984 |
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