



Guide to the George McClellan Derby Letters, 1874-1924 and undated

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Summary

Collection Title:

George McClellan Derby Letters, 1874-1924 and undated

Creator:

Derby, George M.

Abstract:

George McClellan Derby (1856-1948) was a U.S. Army engineer recognized for his aerial balloon assests and reconnaissance efforts during the Santiago de Cuba campaign of the Spanish-American War. For the majority of his military career, he was involved in river engineering projects throughout the United States. The collection includes letters to George McClellan Derby, letters to his wife, Bessie (Kidder) Derby, and several letters written by Derby to his mother. Over 50 letters are grouped by originator within the George McClellan Derby series, 29 of which pertain to Derby's military career, mainly in relation to his responsibilities as Assistant Engineer in charge of New York river and harbor works during the mid-1880s. Nearly 90 letters, written by Derby's friend and uncle-in-law, Clarence F. Low, are arranged chronologically by year within the Clarence F. Low series. The collection, chiefly personal in nature, offers insights into the private life of this prominent military engineer and an indication of the challenges involved in conducting underwater explosions. Materials range in date from 1874 to 1907, 1924, and undated.

Extent:

0.4 Linear Feet
145 Items

Physical Location:

For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.

Language:

English

Language:

Material in English

Collection ID:

RL.00304

Permalink:

<http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/derbygeorgemcclellan/>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], George McClellan Derby Letters, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University

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Background

Scope and Content

The collection includes letters to George McClellan Derby, a military engineer recognized for his aerial balloon ascents and reconnaissance efforts during the Santiago de Cuba campaign of the Spanish-American War, as well as letters to his wife, Bessie (Kidder) Derby, and several letters written by Derby to his mother. Over 50 letters are grouped by originator within the **George McClellan Derby** series, 29 of which pertain to Derby's military career, mainly in relation to his responsibilities as Assistant Engineer in charge of New York river and harbor works during the mid-1880s. Nearly 90 letters, written by Derby's friend and uncle-in-law, Clarence F. Low, are arranged chronologically by year within the **Clarence F. Low** series. The collection, chiefly personal in nature, offers insights into the private life of this prominent military engineer and an indication of the challenges involved in conducting underwater explosions. Materials range in date from 1874 to 1907, 1924, and undated.

Biographical/Historical

Chronology

Date	Description
1856 Nov. 1	Born at sea to George Horatio Derby (1823-1861) and Mary A. (Coons) Derby
1865-1871	Educated in Paris, Dresden, and Lausanne, Switzerland

Date	Description
1874-1878	Attended the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y. (# 2717); graduated top of class
1878 June 14	Promoted to Second Lieutenant, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army
1881 Jan. 2	Promoted to First Lieutenant, Corps of Engineers
1881-1889	Served as Assistant Engineer in charge of river and harbor works in New York and northeastern New Jersey including the Hell Gate obstruction removal project
1888 Apr. 7	Promoted to Captain, Corps of Engineers
1889-1893	Taught at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.
1893-1894	Served as Assistant to Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia
1894-1902	In charge of 4th District, Mississippi River improvements
1898 May 9	Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and Chief Engineer, U.S. Volunteers
1898 July 5	Promoted to Major, Corps of Engineers
1898 July 5-Oct. 1	Served as Chief Engineer, Fifth Army Corps, in Cuba during the Santiago campaign of the Spanish-American War, and later as Chief Engineer, Second Army Corps

Date	Description
1902-1903	In charge of Louisville and Portland canal and other river and harbor works in Louisville, Kentucky
1903-1906	In charge of reservoirs at headwaters of the Mississippi River in Minnesota
1904 Apr. 4	Married Bessie Kidder (b. 1884) of New Orleans, daughter of Bessie (Low) Kidder and niece of Clarence F. Low
1906 May 5	Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, Corps of Engineers
1907 June 7	Retired at own request from military service
1948 Oct. 25	Died in New Orleans, Louisiana

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Acquisition Information

The George McClellan Derby Letters were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a purchase in 2008.

Processing Information

Processed by Danielle Moore, August 2010

Encoded by Danielle Moore, August 2010

Accession 2008-0258 is described in this finding aid.

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Names and Subjects

- Communication in families -- History
- Families of military personnel -- History
- River engineering -- New York (State) -- History -- 19th century
- Underwater explosions -- History -- 19th century
- United States Military Academy -- Students -- History -- 19th century
- New Orleans (La.) -- History -- 20th century
- Derby, George M.
- Low, Clarence F.
- Derby, Bessie

- Derby, George M.

Collection Inventory

George McClellan Derby Series, 1874-1902, 1924, and undated

Physical Description: 4 folders

Scope and Contents note

The series includes several letters from Derby to his mother that reflect his struggle adjusting to life at West Point (1874-1875 and undated), and two letters written to her while on leave in France (1888); 15 letters to Derby from his mother (1895-1896, 1902, and undated) along with two enclosed letters from others; 29 letters to Derby that pertain to his efforts as a military engineer, most of which are from suppliers such as Hecla Powder Co., Rendrock Powder Co., and Rand Drill Co. regarding explosives and other equipment required for removing underwater obstructions (1884-1886 and undated); and 3 items from other sources including a telegram dated 1924.

Letters from Derby, 1874-1875, 1888, and undated	Box 1
Letters from Derby's mother, 1895-1896, 1902, and undated	Box 1
Letters from military suppliers and personnel, 1884-1886 and undated	Box 1
Letters from others, 1924 and undated	Box 1

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Clarence F. Low Series, 1898-1907 and undated

Physical Description: 5 folders

Scope and Contents note

The series includes more than 80 letters to Derby or to his wife from her uncle, Clarence F. Low, the Resident Secretary of the New Orleans office of Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Company of England. Although written or typed on company letterhead paper, most of the letters are personal, revealing a fatherly love and concern for his niece, whom he called Marjorie, and for Derby, his friend and son-in-law as of 1904. Many are signed "Nunkie." Letters dating from late 1906 to early 1907 provide regular accounts of the Derby's young son,

George Townsend, who resided with Low in New Orleans while Derby and his wife vacationed in Italy.

Letters from Clarence Low, 1898-1903	Box 1
Letters from Clarence Low, 1904	Box 1
Letters from Clarence Low, 1905	Box 1
Letters from Clarence Low, 1906	Box 1
Letters from Clarence Low, 1907 and undated	Box 1

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