

Chicago Academy of Sciences / Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum
ARCHIVES – FINDING AID

Collection Title: William C. Davidson Papers

Creator: Davidson, William Christopher, USN (ca 1870-1904)

Dates: 1895-1897

Language: English

Extent: 1 Linear Foot (1 flat storage box)

Level of Description: Folder Level

Repository: Museum Collections and Archives, Chicago Academy of Sciences /Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

Access Conditions: Open for research.

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Citation: Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [item], [folder], [box], William C. Davidson Papers, Chicago Academy of Sciences / Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum.

Acquisition Information: Acquisition of papers is not clearly defined.

Processor and Date: Amber K. King, September 2010; updated by Dawn R. Roberts, July 2017

Processing Note: The duty orders found in the envelope glued to the inside cover has been removed from the envelope and placed in an archival folder in the same box as the diary. The diary binding is very fragile and has become separated. There is evidence of a previous repair attempt utilizing paper adhesive tape that has also failed. The book should be handled with care. Some of the photographs glued into the diary are separated from the book or in more than one piece.

Biographical Sketch: William Christopher Davidson was a graduate of the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. A native of Indiana, he was appointed a midshipman from South Dakota in 1891. He graduated from the academy in 1895 and was then given duty with the, then new, cruiser, the U.S.S. Olympia. He served on that ship from 1895-1897.

In 1897 he was given the rank of ensign and assigned to the U.S.S. Concord, where he served during the Spanish American War. He was present on that ship during the historic Battle of Manila Bay, in 1898, which gave the United States control over the Philippine Islands. He was cited specifically in reports made by the commanding officer, Commander Asa Walker and Lieut. Commander G.P. Colvocoresses, for performing his duties well.

He continued his military service in the navy until his untimely death in 1904. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant (junior grade) on July 1, 1900 and to Lieutenant on June 18, 1902. While serving on the U.S.S. Missouri (BB-11) during target practice the gun turret in which he was working caught on fire and the ammunition stored near the turret caused an explosion that killed Davidson and 35 other officers and crew. This accident caused a review of the arrangements on naval ships of ammunition storage that greatly reduced the number of future accidents of this type. He had also served on the U.S.S. Brooklyn, U.S.S. Monocacy, U.S.S. Alliance, U.S.S. Franklin and the torpedo station at Newport, Rhode Island. He left behind a wife, Juliet L. Davidson.

Resources:

Register of the Commissioned and Warrant Officers of the Navy of the United States and of the Marine Corps to January 1, 1895. Washington: Government Printing Office. 1895.

Official Register of the United States, containing a list of the Officers and Employees in the Civil, Military, and naval Service, together with a list of vessels belonging to the United States, July 1, 1901. Vol. 1. Washington: Government Printing Office. 1901.

Scope and Content: The materials in this collection consist of one diary and related materials found within that diary. It encompasses the impressions made on Davidson as he made his first voyage after his graduation from Annapolis and joined the crew of the U.S.S. Olympia as a part of the Asiatic Squadron. The time he spent on this vessel predates the Spanish-American War and was part of a goodwill effort on the part of the United States toward Asian countries, specifically Russia, Japan, and China.

Series Description:

Series 1: Diary (1895-1897)

This is the diary of William C. Davidson and his travels on the U.S. Olympia from 1895-1897. He was assigned to duty on the vessel after he graduated from the Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD. It details his experiences on the vessel on the voyage from San Francisco to the Pacific and Back. The ship sailed to Hawaii, Japan, China, and Siberia. It contains detailed notes on trips taken inland, the people and customs, his views of these customs and how they compare to the United States, and notes on the mood and views of other crew members. Incorporated throughout the diary are photographs and clippings that illustrate the country and customs he is describing.

Container List:

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|-----------|
| Box 1 | | | |
| Series 1: Diary (1895-1897) | | | |
| | 1 | Diary – “Record of Things that I have Seen, Heard of, and Read about during my Cruise on the United States Flagship Olympia, 1895-96-97” | 1895-1897 |
| | 2 | Diary – Duty Orders (found in enveloped glued to inside front cover) | 1895 |