

Lee, Claudius, Papers

Claudius Lee Papers

1887-1954



Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.1961.002

Unit Date

1887-1954

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

The collection contains correspondence, photographs, and miscellaneous materials relating to the personal life and university and military service of Claudius Lee, a professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering at Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Creator

Lee, Claudius, 1872-1962

Extent

0.3 Cubic Feet 1 box, 1 oversize folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

Collection is open to research.

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Source of Acquisition

The Claudius Lee Papers were donated to Special Collections in 1961. Additional materials were donated in 1963 and 1976.

Processing Information

The processing, arrangement and description of the Claudius Lee Papers commenced in December 2004 and was completed in January 2005. Preliminary processing had apparently been performed in the early 1970s.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], Claudius Lee Papers, Ms1961-002, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

Claudius Lee was born on May 30, 1872 in Culpeper Court House, Virginia. He worked at his father's mill and also served as an apprentice to a gunsmith in Danville. He studied at Lafayette College (Pennsylvania) before being brought to Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) to establish the college's physics laboratory while furthering his own education. Graduating with a degree in electrical engineering in 1896, Lee is credited with installing Blacksburg's first telephone switchboard and bringing an electric lighting system to the campus and town. He devised controls to regulate all the college bells and was the university's timekeeper from December 1893 to 1956.

Lee served as superintendent of the campus power plant from 1899 to 1907, and as local manager of the Virginia and Tennessee Telephone Company from 1900 to 1909. He became a professor in 1914. From 1917 to 1919, Lee served in the U. S. Army as a captain of ordnance. Following World War I, he returned to Blacksburg and headed the electrical engineering department from 1919 to 1936. In all, Lee served the college in various capacities for 69 years. The subjects which he taught included telephony, telegraphy, direct and alternating current.

Among the many campus, community and professional organizations in which Lee was involved are the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, the YMCA, Phi Kappa Phi, National Society of Professional Engineers, American Society of Engineering Education, Virginia Academy of Science, Virginia Education Association, Eta Kappa Nu and Tau Beta Pi. He was a trustee of the Blacksburg Methodist Church, in which his wife was also an active member.

Honoring Lee's long service to the university, a residence hall bearing his name was built in the late 1960s. In recent years, however, Lee's campus reputation has been somewhat tarnished by information gleaned from the 1896 *Bugle*. Within the annual's "organizations" section is a page devoted to the K. K. K., naming Lee as the "father of terror." Lee is also listed as an "arch fiend" in the Pittsylvania Club, whose logo is of the lynching a Black man hanging from a tree. No evidence of campus Klan activity has been found, however, and an investigation has concluded that the pages are racist jokes perpetrated by young men in a nineteenth-century military school dominated by white males. There seems to be no direct evidence in Lee's papers relating to the matter. Several times in recent years, these pages have sparked controversy and led to demands that Lee Hall be re-named. After a petition received over 10,000 signatures in 2020, Lee Hall was renamed Hoge Hall in August of that year.

Lee married Sarah Theresa "Rissie" Otey (born October 14, 1874) on October 24, 1902. their only son, John Henry, died in 1933, the Lees reared Robert and Duval Schultz and Douglas E. Williams. Claudius Lee died December 16, 1962.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains the papers of Claudius Lee, a U. S. Army veteran of World War I and a long-time professor of electrical engineering at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. The collection contains such items as personal and university-related correspondence, various materials relating to Lee's university and military service, fraternal lodge souvenirs, photographs and miscellaneous items.

The collection includes a few pieces of personal correspondence between Lee, his family and friends, as well as correspondence relating to Lee's work at Virginia Tech. Found here are pieces of correspondence between various professors and administrators, including Samuel R. Pritchard, Joseph D. Eggleston, W. H. Rasche, T. B. Hutcheson, Prof. Randolph, F. A. Heacock, Claudius Lee, Julian A. Burruss, and Prof. Staley. Also relating to Virginia Tech is a folder of various materials containing such items as circulars, invitations, place cards, reports on the campus power plant, and images of campus buildings.

A folder of military-related material chronicles Lee's own military service--particularly at a military ordnance training camp--and includes reports and memoranda, as well as general newspaper clippings on World War I.

Souvenirs arising from Lee's affiliation with local fraternal lodges are included, as is a folder of material relating to his attending the General Electric Professor's Conference. A report--mailed to Lee in 1959--on the gristmill at Mount Vernon, Virginia, is included as well.

The collection contains a small set of photographs including various portraits of Lee; images of Virginia Tech-related individuals, organizations and scenes; and military groups and scenes.

Completing the collection is a folder of miscellaneous materials, including a South Carolina matriculation ticket for Samuel R. Pritchard (1887); Lee's grade report from the Danville Military Institute (1890); several souvenir postcard booklets of Peoria, Illinois and military scenes; and a pair of phonograph records, made by former students of Lee and presented to him on his 80th birthday.

Separated Materials

Fifty-six volumes of *The Bugle*, the Virginia Tech annual, were added to the collection in 1963. These copies were detached from the Lee Papers and transferred to the library's book collection in the 1970s.

An Electrical Engineering Department ledger, dated 1925-1926, was transferred to the Electrical Engineering Department in 1970.

A 1915 map of the Mary Henderson lots (Blacksburg) had been transferred to the Historical Map Collection. The date of the transfer is unknown.

Most of the photographs from the Lee Papers had been transferred to the Photograph Collection (date of transfer unknown). Many of these photos have been located and returned to the Lee Papers. The following images, however, could not be located and are assumed to still remain within the Photograph Collection: Lee residence on scrub faculty row (n.d.); Hungry Hill - front view (1893); T. D. Martin (1896); R. C. Reed (1895/96); Blacksmith shop (1893); Electrical engineering lab and engine room (1896); Foundry (1895); Machine shop (1895); Wood shop (1896); Battery E gun drill (1896); Battery E sabre drill (1895); View from hill east of present stadium (1898); Mess hall and auditorium - old pavilion at right (1896); Judge John Gardner - college treasurer (1894); John Shields (n.d.); Chas. Womack (1893); Bradley S. Johnson (1899); O. C. Thompson (1896); Kendall Weisiger (1899/1900); Robert Henry Shultz (1922?).

Keywords

Faculty and staff

Science and Technology

University Archives

University History

Lee, Claudius, 1872-1962

Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (1872-1896)

Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute (1896-1944)

Virginia Polytechnic Institute (1944-1970)

Rights Statement for Archival Description

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Arrangement

The collection is arranged by type, then chronologically.

Description of Subordinate Components

Correspondence

Unit Date 1893-1934, n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Virginia Tech-related material

Unit Date 1904-1954, n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Military-related material

Unit Date 1917-1919, n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 3 (folder)

Scope and Contents note

[see also Oversize Materials]

Lodge souvenirs

Unit Date 1947-1954

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 4 (folder)

General Electric Professor's Conference

Unit Date 1925-1930

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 5 (folder)

"A report of the findings of Mr. R.E. Burson on the George Washington Grist Mill, situated on Dogue Run Creek, Mount Vernon, Virginia"

Unit Date n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 6 (folder)

Photographs

Unit Date 1895-[1941], n.d.

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 7 (folder)

Extent [4 folders]

Claudius Lee portraits

Unit Date 1895-1902, n.d.

General Physical Description note [4 items]

Sampson Campbell, mule and cart

Unit Date 1895

John C. Dabney
Unit Date c.1894

B. F. McNeil
Unit Date 1898

Douglas Williams
Unit Date n.d.

James _____
Unit Date n.d.

Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical graduating class
Unit Date 1896

Pittsylvania County Club
Unit Date 1896

Shop classes - in front of Preston and Olin Building
Unit Date 1899

Group on porch of Amiss House ("Shades Inn")
Unit Date c.1897

Occupants of "Noah's Ark" (the Effinger house)
Unit Date 1900-1904, n.d.
General Physical Description note [3 items]

Engine Room
Unit Date 1896

Views of "Noah's Ark" (the Effinger house)
Unit Date 1898-1900
General Physical Description note [2 items]

Preston and Olin Building
Unit Date n.d.

Maury Literary Society Hall (second floor of west end, Academic Building No. 2)
Unit Date n.d.

Lee and unidentified man at lake (Lake George, New York?)
Unit Date n.d.
General Physical Description note [2 items]

Scenery at unidentified lake (Lake George, New York?)
Unit Date n.d.
General Physical Description note [3 items]

Lee accepting certificate of merit from Virginia section of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers

Unit Date [1941]

Military group portraits

Unit Date n.d.

General Physical Description note [4 items]

Officers classes 9 and 15 at F. W. D. Auto Company Plant (Clintonville, Wisconsin)

Unit Date n.d.

General Physical Description note [2 items]

Officers quarters at Ordnance Motor Instruction Schools - Holt Manufacturing Company (Peoria, Illinois)

Unit Date n.d.

Unidentified soldier

Unit Date n.d.

Soldiers outside headquarters of Ordnance Motor Instruction School

Unit Date n.d.

Military caterpillar demonstrations

Unit Date n.d.

General Physical Description note [11 items]

Robert L. Morton and the Morton tractor

Unit Date n.d.

General Physical Description note [14 items]

Oversize Materials

Unit Date 1917

oversize 1 (folder)

Claudius Lee's U. S. Army commission

Unit Date 1917