

# A Guide to the Sydney B. Williamson Papers 1909-1939

Sydney B. Williamson Papers 1909-1939

1909-1939

---

A Collection in Virginia Military Institute Archives MS 0206

Virginia Military Institute Archives

2001

## History

**Processed by:** Diane B. Jacob

**Funding:** Web version of the finding aid funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Sydney B. Williamson Papers 1909-1939

**Subtitle:** Williamson, Sydney B., Papers, 1909-1939

**Collection:** MS 0206

**Author:** Diane B. Jacob

**Sponsor:** Web version of the finding aid funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Publication Statement

**File size:** 107 kb

**Date:** © 2001 Virginia Military Institute

**Publisher:** Virginia Military Institute Archives

[Conditions of Use](#)

## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from paper by means of scanning and OCR; OCR file edited in Microsoft Word for typographical errors before encoding. Machine-readable finding aid created by Diane B. Jacob. Date of source: 2001]

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Revision Description

**Feb 16, 2004** PUBLIC "-//Virginia Military Institute::Preston Library::Archives//TEXT (US::ViLxV::vilxv00006::Sydney B. Williamson Papers)//EN" "vilxv00006.xml" converted from EAD 1.0 to 2002 by v1to02.xsl (sy2003-10-15).

**Feb 26, 2004** converted to conform to eadVIVA.dtd by vivastrict.xsl

**2013-11-21** Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

## Descriptive Summary

**Accession number**

MS 0206

## Language

English

## Abstract

Sydney B. Williamson was a civil engineer whose most notable achievement was his service as Division Engineer of the Pacific Division of the Panama Canal construction project (1907- 1914). The collection contains project files, photographs, and drawings documenting Williamson's work in Panama, with particular emphasis on the construction of the Miraflores and Pedro Miguel Locks.

## Physical Characteristics

The collection consists of approximately 1000 items filed in 7 manuscript boxes.

## repository

Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute

# Administrative Information

## Access

There are no restrictions.

## Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

The collection was donated to VMI in 1979 by Sydney W. Smith.

## Preferred Citation

Sydney B. Williamson Papers, MS 0206, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, Virginia.

# Biographical/Historical Information

Chronology 1865 April 15 Sydney Bacon Williamson born at Lexington, Virginia 1884 Graduated from the Virginia Military Institute with a degree in Civil Engineering 1884-1886 Mathematics instructor at Kings Mountain (North Carolina) military school 1886-1887 Served in the engineering departments of St. Paul and Duluth Railway and the Northern Pacific Railway; designed and constructed railroad terminals and bridges 1887-1890 In general engineering practice with Williamson and Earl in Montgomery, Alabama; street paving, sanitary sewers for Montgomery and Columbus, Ga. 1890 May 20 Married Helen Cecilia Davis 1892 Assistant Engineer to Gen. George W. Goethals; in charge of improvements on the Tennessee River; included a canal lock at Riverton, Ala., and Muscle Shoals Canal 1898 Served as Captain, Third Vol. Engineers under Gen. John R. Brooke in Puerto Rico 1901-1903 Engineer of fortifications at Newport, R. I. under Goethals 1903-1907 Consulting engineer in Baltimore and for Jamestown (N.Y.) Exposition 1906-1914 Division Engineer of Pacific Division of Panama Canal under Goethals; responsible for wet and dry excavation of Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks; also designed and constructed Pacific Terminal docks, water supply, sewers, road and streets for the towns of the division including the city of Panama 1914-1916 Became Chief of Construction for J.G. White and Co., Ltd. of London; worked on power station and street railway for Brazil, water supply for Genoa, Italy, additions to street railway in Buenos Aires; Chief of Construction of U.S. Reclamation Service; supervised work of Central Office in Denver involving dams, reservoirs, power plants, canals 1916-1924 Consulting Engineer for Guggenheim Brothers in New York; worked on Chile Copper Co.'s plant and Braden Copper Co.'s plant; increased mining, milling, leaching, smelting, and power plants; also constructed houses for employees; water and sewer systems 1918 World War I service. Leave of absence to serve as Lt. Col. of Engineers in France; Section Engineer of Intermediate Section West; built barracks, hospitals, warehouses, remount stations, ammunition dumps, water supplies; Nov. 4, promoted to Colonel 1919 Discharged from army and returned to Guggenheim Brothers 1924-1929 Civil engineering practice at Birmingham, Alabama, and Charlottesville, Virginia 1926-1928 Consulting Engineer with Goethals at Port of Palm Beach, Florida; also consulted on water supplies for several towns in Virginia and Hollywood, FL 1928 Employed by U.S. District Engineer at Philadelphia; worked on dikes to control Delaware River 1929 Principal Engineer, U.S. Engineering Dept.; investigated feasibility of Nicaragua Canal 1931 Appointed member of Interoceanic Canal Board by President Herbert Hoover; served until retirement in 1935 1933-1935 Engaged by U.S. Army corps of engineers to determine damages done by Mississippi flood control program and to testify before courts 1939 January 13 Died at Lexington, Virginia

# Scope and Content Information

The bulk of the collection documents Williamson's engineering assignments in Panama, South America, and the United States, and his service on the Interoceanic Canal Board. The collection consists of the following series: Biographical and historical materials; Correspondence; Project and Planning Files; Engineering

Drawings and Specifications; Reports, Papers and Speeches; Photographs; Printed Materials and Miscellaneous. The sizable group of drawings and specifications for the Panama Canal construction is of particular importance. Also of interest in the Photographs series is a Panama Album which includes photos of President William H. Taft's tour of the Panama Canal construction site, as well as photos recording in detail the massive task of constructing the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks; many of these photographs are unpublished.

## **Contents List**

### **Biographical and historical items**

**Box-folder** 1:1

### **Correspondence 1912-1935**

**Box-folder** 1:2

### **Engineering Project and Planning Files**

#### **Masonry dams, including Pernambuco Power House**

**Box-folder** 1:3

#### **Noes on Nicaragua Canal**

**Box-folder** 1:4

#### **Notes on the Nicaragua Canal: Book No. 1**

**Box-folder** 1:5

#### **Notes on the Nicaragua Canal: Book No. 2**

**Box-folder** 1:6

#### **Lake Worth Inlet Terminal**

**Box-folder** 1:7

#### **Notes, various projects**

**Box-folder** 2:1

##### **Scope and Content**

Notes on work with State of Alabama; Front Royal, Va. Storage Dam Lexington, Va. Storage Dam; Lake Worth Inlet Terminal

#### **Mississippi Floodways**

**Box-folder** 2:2

##### **Scope and Content**

"Comparison of Floodway Crossings as Proposed by the Yazoo and Miss. Valley Ry. and the U. S."

#### **Mississippi Floodway**

**Box-folder** 2:3

##### **Scope and Content**

Notes

#### **Muscle Shoals; Chile Copper Plant**

**Box-folder** 2:4

#### **Louisiana State Highway Project**

**Box-folder** 2:5

**Box-folder** 2:6

# Panama Canal: Drawings and Specifications

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:1

### **Scope and Content**

Lock Gates and machinery on them; Gate recess covers; Gate operating machinery.

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:2

### **Scope and Content**

Lighting material, panel boards, reflectors, lamps, etc.

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:3

### **Scope and Content**

Upper guard gate valve machines

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:4

### **Scope and Content**

Chain fenders

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:5

### **Scope and Content**

Transformer Room equipment

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:6

### **Scope and Content**

Structural steel for Gatun hydro electric

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:7

### **Scope and Content**

Towing locomotives and tracks for same

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:8

### **Scope and Content**

Spillway footbridges

Spillway Caissons

Spillway Gates

Spillway Gate machinery

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:9

### **Scope and Content**

Stoney Sluice machinery, Stoney Gates; bulkheads, screens and intakes.

## **Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:10

**Scope and Content**

Misc. electrical wiring for power and control wiring

**Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:11

**Scope and Content**

Snubbing posts; buffer castings

**Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:12

**Scope and Content**

Cylindrical valve machinery; culvert drainage pumps; machinery chambers and layouts; numbering system; S. B. Williamson

**Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:13

**Scope and Content**

Auxiliary electrical equipment for Gatun hydro electric station

**Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 3:14

**Scope and Content**

Extra contract prices

## **Reports, Papers and Speeches**

**Report: Final Report of the Toconce Pipeline**

**Box-folder** 4:1

**Report: Chile Exploration Company**

**Box-folder** 4:2

**Report: Comparison of Estimates and Final Cost of Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 4:3

**Report: Interoceanic Canal**

**Box-folder** 4:4

**Report: Delaware River**

**Box-folder** 4:5

**Paper by Williamson. The Chief Engineers of the Panama Canal**

**Box-folder** 4:6

**Speech by Williamson. Practicing Engineering**

**Box-folder** 4:7

## **Photographs**

**Panama Album, #s 1-13**

**Box-folder** 5:1

**Scope and Content**

Canal Engineers; social life in Panama; living quarters

**Panama Album, #s 14-24**

**Box-folder** 5:2

**Scope and Content**

Visit of United States President William H. Taft to Panama to view canal construction

**Panama Album, #s 25-35**

**Box-folder** 5:3

**Scope and Content**

Visit of United States President William H. Taft to Panama to view canal construction

**Panama Album, #s 36-45**

**Box-folder** 5:4

**Scope and Content**

Construction of the Pedro Miguel Lock

**Panama Album, #s 46-55**

**Box-folder** 5:5

**Scope and Content**

Construction of the Pedro Miguel Lock

**Panama Album, #s 56-67**

**Box-folder** 5:6

**Scope and Content**

Construction of the Pedro Miguel Lock

**Panama Album, #s 68-79**

**Box-folder** 5:7

**Scope and Content**

Construction of the Miraflores Lock

**Panama Album, #s 80-90**

**Box-folder** 5:8

**Scope and Content**

Construction of the Miraflores Lock

**Panama Album, #s 90-99**

**Box-folder** 5:9

**Scope and Content**

Construction of the Miraflores Lock

**Panama Album, #s 100-115**

**Box-folder** 5:10

**Scope and Content**

Construction of the Miraflores Lock and Balboa Terminals

**Portrait of Sydney B. Williamson**

**Box-folder** 6:1

**Panama and hydraulic excavation**

**Box-folder** 6:2

## **Hydraulic mining, California, 1909.**

**Box-folder** 6:3

## **Miraflores Lock construction**

**Box-folder** 6:4

## **Miraflores Lock construction**

**Box-folder** 6:5

## **Pedro Miguel Lock construction**

**Box-folder** 6:6

## **Pedro Miguel Lock construction**

**Box-folder** 6:7

## **Pedro Miguel Lock construction**

**Box-folder** 6:8

## **Chile**

**Box-folder** 6:9

## **Chile**

**Box-folder** 6:10

## **Chile**

**Box-folder** 6:11

## **Chile**

**Box-folder** 7:1

## **Chile**

**Box-folder** 7:2

## **Chile**

**Box-folder** 7:3

## **Chile**

**Box-folder** 7:4

## **Bolivia**

**Box-folder** 7:5

## **Peru, Bolivia, Chile**

**Box-folder** 7:6

## **Bolivia, Chile**

**Box-folder** 7:7

## **Chile**

**Box-folder** 7:8

## **Chile, Ecuador, Panama**

**Box-folder** 7:9

## **Negatives**

**Box-folder** 7:10

## **Printed Material and Miscellaneous**

### **Bill for Injunction: Jackson vs. Lake Worth Inlet District**

**Box-folder** 4:8

### **Passport**

**Box-folder** 4:9

### **Postcards**

**Box-folder** 4:9

#### **Scope and Content**

Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Italy, France

Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute