

RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

William Pitt Mason (1853-1937) Papers, 1877-1924.

MC # 1
Vol.: 1.5 Linear Feet
Restrictions: none

Biographical/Historical Note

William Pitt Mason was born in New York, NY, on October 12, 1853, the son of James and Emma (Wheatly) Mason. After preparing at Bernard French Institute, New York City, he entered R.P.I. in 1870, and graduated in as a civil engineer in 1874. In 1875, after a year of travel and study in Europe, Mason was appointed assistant in chemistry and natural science at R.P.I. He advanced to assistant professor in 1882, professor of analytical chemistry in 1885, and head of the chemistry department in 1895. In 1912, when the department of chemical engineering was established at RPI, he became its first head and remained in that position until his retirement in 1925.

Through his years of teaching, Mason continued his own studies in the U.S. and Europe. He received a BS degree from RPI in 1877; an MD degree from Albany Medical College in 1881; studied bacteriology at the Pasteur Institute, Paris, in 1889 and 1893; and received an LL.D. degree from Lafayette College, PA, in 1908. Mason devoted himself to the field of analytical chemistry and sanitary engineering and became internationally known for his research in water analysis and his advocacy of pure water. He became the first academic president of the American Water Works Association, a member of the U.S. Assay Commission in 1896, a fellow in the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and an honorary member of several European societies of municipal and sanitary engineers.

Mason married Emilie Harding in 1866. Emilie died in 1899, leaving one son, William Pitt, Jr. In 1908 Mason married Margaret Betts. William Pitt Mason died January 25, 1937.

Scope and Content Note

The William Pitt Mason Papers Span the years 1877 to 1924, with the bulk of the material falling into the period 1885 to 1915. The papers consist primarily of letterpress books of scientific and business correspondence; investigation results and records of water analysis; bibliographical notations; notes by RPI students on experiments and water investigation; and published articles written by Mason. The majority of the manuscripts deal with Mason's professional research interest in water analysis.

Mason's correspondence dealing with the analysis of city, town, state and private water supplies reflects not only his concern for pure drinking water, but more generally, his tendency to apply his scientific knowledge in the resolution of local concerns. Although Mason traveled throughout the United States to analyze water, many of his investigations were conducted on the Poestenkill River in Rensselaer County. The manuscripts also include handwritten pencil notes on astronomy, religion, and the history of Chemistry.

The papers have been arranged chronologically with the letters, speeches, and notebooks preceding the published articles. The collection was donated in 1967 by Professor Stanley Bunce, the assistant chairman of the Chemistry Department at RPI. There have been no restrictions placed upon this collection.

Inventory

Box	Folder	Description	Date
1	1	Letter to Dr. G.S. Towne concerning the water of Saratoga Springs, NY	1924
	2	Speeches – "Purification of Polluted Water" Speeches – "Water and Disease" Speeches – "Professional Education"	
		Letterpress book - lab supplies for Chemistry Department	Sep. 1887 - May 1905
	3	Letterpress book - State water investigations	1888- 1911
	4	Letterpress book: "Water No. 2" Letters written by Mason re: his findings after analyzing city, town, private, etc. water supplies	Mar 1902- Apr 1909
	5	Index Rerum: Water, air and sanitation citations	1898
2	1	Index Rerum: "William P. Mason" bibliographical / alphabetical citations to chemical subjects	
	2	Notebook: "William P. Mason, July 12, 1877" pencil written notes on astronomy, religion, and the history of chemistry	1877
	3	Notebook: "Notes by students #225"	Dec. 1904 - Apr 1907
	4	Notebook: <u>Stenographic Notes of Dr. Welch's Lectures Johns Hopkins University, Fall of 1907</u>	

- 2 5 Notebook: "William P. Mason, Troy, NY" Misc. looseleaf notes, filed alphabetically, dealing with temperature data of Tamhannock Reservoir and pipe line, analysis of Mohawk and Poestenkill Rivers, proposed plant for Watervliet, etc.
- 3 1 Notebook: Analysis of water, Vol. 1, 1898-1905. Notes on Mason's water supply investigations. 256 entries.
- 2 Notebook: Analysis of Water, Vol. 2, 1905-1924. Notes on Mason's Water supply investigation. 192 entries.
- 4 1 Report on Waterworks Extensions for Troy, NY 1885-1895
- 2 Published Articles
- Report on the Albany Water Supply made to the Board of Health of the City of Albany. Albany: the Argus Company, 1885
- "The United States Gallon." Journal of the American Chemical Society, November 1888.
- "Fatal Poisoning by Carbon Monoxide." Journal of the American Chemical Society, November 1891,
- "Notes on Some Cases of Drinking Water and Disease." Journal of the Franklin Institute, November 1891,
- "Purification of Water by Freezing." The Journal of the American Chemical Society, 1892
- Mason, and Hine "Notes on the Direct Oxidation of Organic Matter in Water." Journal of the American Chemical Society, 1892
- "Note on Boiler-Explosions." June 1892.
- Mason and Arosemena "Note on the Effect of Sedimentation on the Self-purification of Running Streams." The Journal of analytical and Applied Chemistry, Sept., 1892
- "A Recent Poison Case." The Journal of Analytical and Applied Chemistry, June 1893.

- 4 Report on An Additional Water Supply for the City of Troy. Troy: The Troy Press Co., 1893
- Mason and Bowman, "Loss of Gold and Silver During Scorification Assay." Journal of the American Chemical Society, May 1894
- "Noted on the Hardening of Mortar." Journal of the American Chemical Society, Nov., 1894.
- Mason and Bowman "Note on the Test for Stycnine." Journal of the American Chemical Society, Dec, 1894.
- "Rainfall and Typhoid Fever." Journal of the Franklin Institute, Sept. 1895
- 4 3 In the Court of Appeals, State of NY. "Mary Egan vs. The New Jersey Steamboat Company." Troy: Troy Times Printing House, 1896. (Mason a witness)
- "Chemical vs. Bacteriological Examination of Potable Water." Journal of the American Chemical Society, February 1896
- "An address by Vice President William P. Mason." Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1897.
- "Sanitary Problems Connected with Municipal Water Supply." Journal of the Franklin institute, May, 1897.
- Raymond, WG and Mason Report on an Additional Water Supply for the City of Troy. Troy Press Print, 1897.
- "Some thoughts concerning the teaching of Chemistry". Science, May 1898
- "Measurements of Turbidity in Water." Journal of the American Chemical Society, June, 1899.
- Hazen, Allen with discussion by Mason and others The Albany Water Filtration Plant, 1900
- 4 4 Published Articles 1904-1910

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“Notes.” Journal of the American Chemical Society. June, 1899

“Procède de Lecture des Tubes Ammoniacaux de Nessler Pour L’analyse des Eaux.” Journal of the American Chemical Society. June 1904

“The Use of copper Suphate to Guars Against Typhoid Fever Epidemics Coming form Unfiltered Surface water Supplies.” Journal of the New England Water Works Association. 1905.

“The Explosion of the Saratoga Septic Tank.” Journal of the New England Water Works Association. 1907

“A note on the Spontaneous Ignition of Gas from Sewage.” Journal of the New England Water Works Association. 1907.

“Note as to the Measurement of the Action of Water Upon Metals.” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society. 1907

New York Board of Water Commissioners.
Improved Water Supply Mechanical Filtration and Appurtenances. Cohoes: The Cohoes Republican Co. Print, 1909.

“L’uration de l’eau des distributions d’eau par l’emploi d’hypochlorites.” April, 1909.

“A Plea for the Wide and Better Extension of the Knowledge of Sanitary Science.” Science. April, 1909.

“Typhoid Mary.” Science. July, 1909.

“The Purification of Water Supplies by the Use of Hypochlorites.” Proceedings American Philosophical Society. 1909.

“The Maidstone Typhoid Epidemic.” Journal of the New England Water Works Association. 1910.

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Published Articles 1911-1923

- 4 5 Report on Investigations Made for a Satisfactory and Safe Drinking Water Supply for the Town and Village of Waterford, New York. Waterford Water Works Company, 1911.
- “Advantages and Disadvantages of Reservoir Storage.” Journal of the Franklin Institute, April, 1914.
- “Contributions of the Chemist to the Potable Water Industry.” The Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry, April 1915.
- “The Value of the Sanitary Survey.” Science, December, 1916.
- “Camp Sanitation.” Journal of the Franklin Institute, June, 1918.
- “Swimming Pool Management.” Journal of the New England Water Works Association, 1919.
- “The Practical Design and Management of Swimming Pools.” The American City, March, 1920.
- “Damage to Deep Wells by Sea Water.” Journal of American Water Works Association, January, 1921.
- “Water.” Referecne Handbook of the Medical Sciences, 1923.
- “The Collapse of the Autoclave.” Industrial and Engineering Chemistry, July 1923.
- Published Articles, undated:
- “Peculiar Instance of Contamination of a Well Water.” American Water Works Association.
- “Assays of Ores.” RPI
- “Directions for Taking a Water Sample.”
- “Forme particuliere de pollution d’eau de lac.”
- 4 6 Notebook: “W.P. Mason, e.g. 1915” Notes on Qualitative Analysis (Blank book)
- In Chancery of N.J. Mayor and Alderman of Jersey City vs. Jersey City Water Supply Co.

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Russian Coin – 3 roubles

Gavel: “American Water Works Association/ Dr.
Wm. P. Mason/ President/ New Orleans/ 1910”