

**The New York Public Library
Stephen A. Schwarzman Building
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Guide to the

John Francis Sullivan papers

ca. 1906-1933 (bulk 1920-1930)

MssCol 2923

Compiled by Julie Miller, February 1989

Summary

Creator: Sullivan, John Francis, 1878-

Title: John Francis Sullivan papers, ca. 1906-1933 (bulk 1920-1930)

Size: 16.1 linear feet (13 boxes, 5 other items)

Source: Transfer from the Municipal Reference Library, 1937

Abstract: John Francis Sullivan (1878-) was an engineer who worked on New York City municipal improvement projects from the 1900s through the 1920s. In 1930 he was appointed City Planner. From 1918 to 1920, as an Army Reserve officer, Sullivan directed construction of the United States Nitrate Plant No. 2 at Muscle Shoals, Alabama. He also served in 1927 as a consultant on the construction of the Cooper River Bridge in Charleston, South Carolina. Collection consists of correspondence, reports, minutes, transcripts, blueprints, maps, notes, sketches, photographs, and printed matter chiefly concerning the projects Sullivan worked on in New York City.

Access: Apply to Manuscripts and Archives Division for access at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>.

Preferred citation: John Francis Sullivan papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Related collections

Robert Moses papers, 1912-1980. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

William J. Wilgus papers, 1895-1947. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Creator history

John Francis Sullivan (1878-) was an engineer who worked on New York City municipal improvement projects from the 1900s through the 1920s. In 1930 he was appointed City Planner. From 1918 to 1920, as an Army Reserve officer, Sullivan directed construction of the United States Nitrate Plant No. 2 at Muscle Shoals, Alabama. He also served in 1927 as a consultant on the construction of the Cooper River Bridge in Charleston, South Carolina.

Sullivan was born in Hendersonville, North Carolina in 1878, and graduated from Clemson College in South Carolina in 1900. From 1900 to 1904 Sullivan worked as a draftsman and engineer for the United States Army in Washington D.C. and in New York City. From 1906 to 1908 he was an assistant engineer with the Pennsylvania Railroad working on the New York/New Jersey Hudson River tunnels. From 1908 through the end of the 1920s, except for the nearly two years he spent in Muscle Shoals, and some private consulting work, Sullivan was employed by, or served as a consultant to, a number of New York City departments and agencies, including: Public Service Commission, Engineering Department; Board of Estimate and Apportionment; Borough of Manhattan, Bureau of Highways; and the Office of the

Manhattan Borough President (Julius Miller). In New York City, Sullivan was also a consultant to the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce and the New York State Transit Commission.

There are obituaries for nine John Sullivans in the New York Times Obituaries Index, but this John Sullivan is the subject of none of them. Sullivan probably died after 1930, when he was appointed City Planner, and before 1937, the date these papers arrived at the New York Public Library.

Scope and content note

Sullivan's papers, ca. 1902-1933, consist of: correspondence (including letters from engineer William J. Wilgus whose papers are also at the New York Public Library); telegrams; reports; minutes; hearing transcripts; blueprints; maps; charts; notes; sketches; photographs; specifications; cost estimates; contracts; printed material; and many clippings. The bulk of this material dates from the 1920s and chiefly concerns Sullivan's many projects in New York City. Pre-1920s papers (excluding United States Nitrate Plant No.2 files) fill approximately one half linear foot, and there are only a few inches of material dating from the 1930s.

Specific New York City projects documented include (all dates are approximate): the West Side Improvement, 1909-1920s, including the plan to relocate the New York Central Railroad tracks which ran along Eleventh Avenue and a plan for an elevated highway on the West Side; sewers and New York Harbor pollution, 1912-1928; subways and bus routes, 1900s-1920s; New York/New Jersey port and harbor development, 1919-1920; a Bronx/Manhattan tunnel at Spuyten Duyvil, 1920s (unrealized); various plans for avoiding or relieving traffic congestion in Manhattan, 1920s, including elevated roads and walkways, and a Thirty-eighth Street vehicular tunnel planned to originate at Twelfth Avenue, burrow under Manhattan, and emerge at Borden Avenue in Queens (the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, which fulfills a portion of this plan, was not completed until 1940); sites proposed in Manhattan and Brooklyn for a fruit and vegetable terminal market, late 1920s; construction of the Hudson River (George Washington) Bridge, 1926-1927; and Atlantic Avenue grade crossing elimination, 1930. Of note is John D. Rockefeller's original letter (June 5, 1930, with accompanying documents) to Mayor Walker offering the site for Fort Tryon Park in northern Manhattan, along with some additional land on the Upper East Side, to the city.

Sullivan's work, 1926-1927, on the Cooper River Bridge in Charleston, South Carolina is also documented in these files, and some personal and miscellaneous material is included. Personal material consists of curriculum vitae, certificates and medals, some financial papers, material concerning Clemson College alumni activities, and papers documenting Sullivan's participation in New York City Democratic organizations, particularly the New York Engineer's Committee for Smith and Roosevelt, 1928, on whose board he served. A small amount of this material which was found unaccompanied by related documents is in a folder labeled "personal" in box 4, but the bulk of it is scattered throughout the files. Miscellaneous material, also in box 4, consists of a group of train timetables, BMT and IRT subway maps dating from the 1920s, travel brochures, invitations, various printed announcements, and a small group of notes and sketches found by themselves. Many more notes and sketches can be found scattered throughout the entire collection. Similarly, clippings and printed material concerning projects on which Sullivan worked, and a variety of other generally related topics, are found everywhere in the collection, but many large piles of these have been separated and are now in boxes 10-12.

There is approximately one linear foot of Board of Estimate and Apportionment records, 1926-1929, chiefly copies of requests from city departments and other bodies funded by the city, and related Board resolutions.

United States Nitrate Plant No.2 records, 1918-1921, consist of correspondence, reports, blueprints, tables, clippings, photographs, and lantern slides. These document the construction of the plant at Muscle Shoals, and the ensuing congressional investigation into allegations that money had been wasted on the work. Many of the photographs are rolled tightly and will not be available for use until they can be flattened. Among the usable photographs are a group of fourteen, undated, showing a visit of the Secretary of War to the plant.

There are photographs scattered throughout the collection, but box 9 contains some that were found by themselves. These include: 17 8x10 prints of New York City roadway bridges under construction (at Greenpoint Ave., Myrtle Ave., Bronx Park, 174th Street, East 238th Street, and Ludlow Ave.); some group and individual portraits, mostly unidentified, 1900s-1920s, but including the Tonkawa Democratic Club dinner dance, New York, 1928, and the May 9, 1908 reunion of the 22nd Regiment, New York Volunteer Infantry; and a number of aerial photographs of New York. An outstanding, large (5.5 feet by 3.3 feet) aerial photograph made up of ten individual prints mounted on linen, undated, ca. late 1920s, centering on Manhattan and showing portions of Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, is in box 13.

Arrangement

Arranged into six groups: chronological files, Board of Estimate files, U.S. Nitrate Plant No.2 files, Photographs, Clippings and printed material, and Oversized material.

Key terms

Subjects

Bridges -- Design and construction
Harbors -- Design and construction
Municipal engineering -- New York (State) -- New York
Nitrates
Roads -- Design and construction -- New York (State) -- New York
Sewage disposal -- New York (State) -- New York
Transportation -- Planning -- New York (State) -- New York
Water -- Pollution

Names

Sullivan, John Francis, 1878-
Wilgus, William J. (William John), 1865-1949

Special formats

Blueprints
Lantern slides
Maps
Photoprints

Occupations

Engineers

Places

John P. Grace Memorial Bridge (Charleston, S.C.)
Muscle Shoals (Ala.)
New York (N.Y.) -- Politics and government -- 1898-1951
West Side (New York, N.Y.)

Container list

Chronological files, 1906-1933

Since many folders contain a range of dates, folders have been arranged chronologically according to the latest dates in each folder. As a result, there is earlier material in boxes 2-4 than their date ranges imply. The parentheses contain the earliest date found in each box.

- b.1 1906-1923
- b.2 1924-1926 (1910)
- b.3 1926-1927 (1924)
- b.4 1928-193; undated (1915)
- b.4 personal
- b.4 invitations and announcements
- b.4 notes and sketches
- b.4 train timetables, subway maps, road maps, travel brochures
- b.5 Board of Estimate and Apportionment files, 1926-1929
- b.6 United States Nitrate Plant No. 2 files, 1918-1921
- b.7 United States Nitrate Plant No. 2 files, 1918-1921
- Photographs, 1900s-1920s
- b.8 United States Nitrate Plant No. 2 photographs, 1918-1921
- b.9 Portraits and New York City photographs, 1900s-1920s
- b.10 Clippings and printed material
- b.11 Clippings and printed material
- b.12 Clippings and printed material

Oversized material

Approximately 100 blueprints, ca. 1890s-1930s (the majority are from the 1910s and 1920s) of New York City projects, including: subway stations, tunnels, tracks, terminals, and routes; the West Side Improvement; and bridges, tunnels (including the Narrows Tunnel), sewers, a few public buildings, and other projects in the five boroughs. A few oversized photographs, including the large aerial photograph of New York City, and a group of oversized lists of jobs, 1920s, are also in box 13. There are six additional rolls of blueprints that remain rolled for lack of space to store them flat. Blueprints found associated with papers are filed with them in the chronological files.

- b.13 Miscellaneous blueprints and photographs
Includes aerial photo described in scope note.
- of.1 Subways, tunnels, and stations
- of.2 Subways, tunnels, and stations
- of.5 Subways, tunnels, and stations
- of.3 West side improvement
- of.4 Miscellaneous blueprints
- of.6 Miscellaneous blueprints
- o.14 Miscellaneous blueprints
- o.15 Miscellaneous blueprints
- o.16 Miscellaneous blueprints
- o.17 Miscellaneous blueprints
- o.18 Miscellaneous blueprints