

Guide to the Frederick Russell Burnham Papers

MS 115



compiled by Christine Weideman and Tamar Evangelestia-Dougherty

October 2002

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 115

CREATOR: Burnham, Frederick Russell, 1861-1947

TITLE: Frederick Russell Burnham papers

DATES: 1864-1976

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 18.33 linear feet (30 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of correspondence, subject files, writings, scrapbooks, film, and photographs documenting the personal and professional life of Frederick Russell Burnham, especially his years in Africa, and his exploration work in Mexico.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0115>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0115>.

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Mrs. Ilo K. Burnham, 1949. Transferred from the Hoover Institute of War, Revolution, and Peace, 1984. Gift of Mr. Frederick R. Burnham II, 2012.

Conditions Governing Access

Original audiovisual materials, as well as preservation and duplicating masters, may not be played. Researchers must consult use copies, or if none exist must pay for a use copy, which is retained by the repository. Researchers wishing to obtain an additional copy for their personal use should consult Copying Services information on the Manuscripts and Archives web site.

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Preferred Citation

Frederick Russell Burnham Papers. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

Frederick Russell Burnham, scout, mining expert, and adventurer, was born on May 11, 1861, in Tivoli, Minnesota, to Reverend Edwin Otway and Rebecca (Russell) Burnham. After nine years of frontier life in Minnesota, during which Frederick and his mother survived an Indian attack on New Ulm, the family moved to Los Angeles. Edwin Burnham died in 1873, and Rebecca and Howard, Frederick's brother, moved back east. Frederick, however, enjoyed California so much that he chose to stay and began to acquire the outdoor skills that were to make him famous. For the next twenty years he travelled throughout the southwestern United States and Mexico. He sought out the best scouts in the regions and from them learned riding, tracking, hunting, and wilderness survival skills. His jobs ranged from mounted messenger for the Western Union Telegraph Company (when he was thirteen), to cowboy, big game hunter and seller, gold prospector, deputy sheriff, and Apache fighter.

While mining for gold in Arizona in 1893, Burnham read in the newspapers of the career of Cecil John Rhodes. Feeling he was being "summoned," Burnham, with his wife, Blanche (Blick), and son, Roderick, journeyed to the South African frontier to be of assistance to Rhodes in his endeavors. For the next four years he was a scout for Rhodes' British South Africa Company, and he fought and gained widespread fame in the two Matabele Wars. He also led exploring expeditions north of the Zambesi River and made significant discoveries of archeological ruins and fields of coal and copper. After returning to North America to mine gold in the Klondike, Burnham went back to Africa early in 1900 to serve as chief of scouts for the British army during the Boer War. Again earning fame for his exploits, and mustered out in 1900 due to injuries received in battle, Burnham was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and the South African Medal by the British government.

Burnham arrived back in the United States in 1904 and during the next three decades he lived in California and engaged in prospecting and archeological expeditions. He was particularly interested in Mexico and made several important archeological discoveries that shed light on the Maya civilization. With John Hays Hammond, the well-known mining engineer who Burnham had first met in Africa, he attempted to irrigate and cultivate the Yaqui Valley in northern Mexico, but encountered difficulties after the outbreak of the Mexican civil war in 1912. The two men were more successful in establishing the Burnham Exploration Company, which operated the productive Dominguez Hill oil field in California.

Burnham had a number of personal interests, to which he devoted a good deal of time and energy. He was a friend and admirer of Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, and helped that organization spread in America. He was concerned with preserving American wilderness and was one of the original members of the California Park Commission. He also explored the importation of wild game animals from Africa to live in the American Southwest where they could provide a food alternative to beef and pork.

Burnham had little formal education, but he learned to read and write at home when he was a child. After being pursued by publishers for a number of years, Burnham wrote two books detailing his life and exploits: *Scouting on Two Continents* (1926) and *Taking Chances* (1944).

Burnham married Blanche Blick of Clinton, Iowa, in 1884, and she accompanied him on many of his trips, as did Blanche's brothers, John and Judd. He had two sons, Roderick and Bruce, and a daughter, Nada. Blanche died in 1938, and in 1943, Burnham married Ilo K. Willetts. He died on September 1, 1947, in Santa Barbara, California.

Scope and Contents

The Frederick Russell Burnham Papers are particularly useful for the detailed information they provide on Africa, from approximately 1893 to 1911. Burnham's correspondence, and that of his wife, Blanche, his journals and diary extracts, and photographs provide written and visual observations of military life, native inhabitants and cultures, geography, and wildlife in south and western Africa. Although Burnham was an American, his views of Africa and its future, native Africans, the Boers, and the wars in which he participated, were very much in keeping with those of British imperialists, many of whom he admired, befriended, and fought alongside. There is also substantive material in his subject files, and extensive photographs, on the mining explorations and development operations he undertook in Mexico, from approximately 1905 to 1920. Blanche's life is primarily documented through the informative letters she wrote to Frederick and other relatives.

Arrangement

Arranged in five series and additional material: I. Correspondence, 1864-1947. II. Subject Files, 1890-1947. III. Writings, 1893-1946. IV. Personal and Family Papers, 1879-1951. V. Photographs, ca. 1893-1924.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1864-1947

The series is arranged in three sections: Family, General, and Letterbook. The Family correspondence is comprised of letters written by Frederick, generally to his wife, Blanche ("BB"); letters written by Blanche to various family members; and letters written by members of the Ingram family, into which one of Blanche's sisters married. The letters of Frederick are excellent sources of information on his trips, explorations, and military assignments, and contain fairly detailed observations of the geography he traversed, the wildlife he hunted, and the native peoples he encountered. Blanche's letters to her relatives often summarize Frederick's trips, the day-to-day routines of her family and social life, and include reports on Roderick and Bruce. Many of the letters in the series from the years 1893 to 1896 were published in *An American Family on the African Frontier: The Burnham Family Letters, 1893-1896*, edited by Mary and Richard Bradford.

The General section is arranged alphabetically by correspondent. Frederick remained in contact with a number of men he met and befriended in Africa, including Lord Baden-Powell, A. Kingsley Macomber, and H. Rider Haggard, and his letters to and from them often contain reminiscences of battles and military life in Africa and commentary on the future of the country. His long friendship and business collaborations with John Hays Hammond are documented in the Hammond files, and in various files in the Subjects series.

A letterbook at the end of the series, entitled "Bulawayo, Rhodesia," holds seven letters written in 1897 by Burnham to Lord Gifford, Henry Green, and John W. Nolan. There is additional correspondence between Burnham and the three men in the General section. The letters are damaged and difficult to read, but appear to concern land and mining claims and sales in Africa.

Family		
b. 1, f. 1 - 10	1864-1900 See also: Oversize Box 25	
b. 2, f. 11 - 20	1900-1908	
b. 3, f. 21 - 32	1909-1919	
b. 4, f. 33 - 39	1919-1945, n.d.	
b. 4, f. 40	Typescripts	1893
General		
b. 5, f. 41	A	1906-1946
b. 5, f. 42	B	1895-1945
b. 5, f. 43	Baden-Powell, Lady	1900-1940
b. 5, f. 44	Baden-Powell, Lord Robert	1941-1946
b. 5, f. 45	Beek, Joseph A.	1941-1945
b. 5, f. 46	Bent, Arthur S.	1899-1929
b. 5, f. 47	Birdwood, F. M., Lord	1945-1946
b. 5, f. 48	Boyes, John	1941-1942, undated

General (continued)

b. 5, f. 49	Brininstoll, E. A.	1945
b. 5, f. 50	C	1900-1946
b. 5, f. 51	Cheney, M. G.	1945
b. 5, f. 52	Christie-Crawford, Arthur	1914-1945
b. 5, f. 53	Churchill, Winston, Sir	1943
b. 5, f. 54	D	1908-1945
b. 5, f. 55	Davis, Richard Harding	1906, undated
b. 5, f. 56	de Chair Family	1929-1945
b. 5, f. 57	E	1896-1947
b. 5, f. 58	F	1906-1945
b. 5, f. 59	Foster, T.W.	1917-1919
b. 5, f. 60	Frick, Childs	1933-1945
b. 6, f. 61	G	1908-1945
b. 6, f. 62	George, John G.	1919-1920
b. 6, f. 63 - 64	Gifford, Maurice, Hon.[military expedition reports]	1895
b. 6, f. 65	Gifford family	1896-1945
b. 6, f. 66	Grant, Madison	1911-1936
b. 6, f. 67	Grey, Earl	1896
b. 6, f. 68 - 69	H	1900-1946
b. 6, f. 70	Haggard, Sir H. Rider	1891-1926
b. 6, f. 71	Hammond, Harris	1911-1936, undated
b. 6, f. 72 - 74	Hammond, John Hays See also: Series II. Subject Files, 1890-1947 Folder 30 See also: Series II. Subject Files, 1890-1947 Folder 31	1905-1936
b. 6, f. 75	Hammond family	1910-1940
b. 6, f. 76	Holder, Charles	1909-1919
b. 6, f. 77	Hoover, Herbert	1925-1939
b. 7, f. 78	Howard, Walter	1938-1941
b. 7, f. 79	Hunter-Weston, Ayler, Sir	1937-1945
b. 7, f. 80	Hutchinson, Joseph K.	1925

General (continued)

b. 7, f. 81	I	1905, 1945
b. 7, f. 82	Ingram, P.	1895
b. 7, f. 83	J	1906-1945
b. 7, f. 84	Jamison, Leander Starr	1895, 1906
b. 7, f. 85	K	1912-1943
b. 7, f. 86	Kinzie, R. L.	1916-1917
b. 7, f. 87	L	1908-1945
b. 7, f. 88	Little, Stanley	1903-1910
b. 7, f. 89	Longan, Patrick See also: Series II. Subject Files, 1890-1947 Folder 63 - 65	1917-1946
b. 7, f. 90	Lord, Elliot	1909
b. 7, f. 91	M	1909-1946
b. 7, f. 92	Mackie, W.W.	1926-1945
b. 7, f. 93	Macnaughton-Jones, H.	1905-1917
b. 7, f. 94	Macomber, A. Kingsley	1895-1945
b. 7, f. 95	Macomber, H. J.	1916-1921
b. 7, f. 96	Mc	1916-1945
b. 7, f. 97	Mudd, Harvey S.	1938-1942
b. 7, f. 98	N	1905-1945
b. 7, f. 99	O	1909-1945
b. 7, f. 100	P	1909-1945
b. 7, f. 101	Perrin, E. B.	1905-1917
b. 7, f. 102	R	1902-1945
b. 8, f. 103	Roosevelt, Archibald	1941-1945
b. 8, f. 104	Roosevelt, Franklin Delano	1933-1941
b. 8, f. 105	Roosevelt, Grace	1934-1945
b. 8, f. 106	Roosevelt, Kermit	1930-1934
b. 8, f. 107	Roosevelt, Theodore, Jr.	1926-1940
b. 8, f. 108	S	1907-1945
b. 8, f. 109	T	1908-1942

General (continued)

b. 8, f. 110	Thompson family	1896-1941
b. 8, f. 111	Thornberry family	1917-1943
b. 8, f. 112	Troxell, L. E.	1915
b. 8, f. 113	V	1906-1919
b. 8, f. 114	W	1897-1945
b. 8, f. 115	Whitcomb, R. E.	1908
b. 8, f. 116	Y	1944
b. 8, f. 117	Unidentified	1900-1919, undated
b. 8, f. 118	Letterbook, "Bulawayo, Rhodesia"	1897

Series II: Subject Files, 1890-1947

The series is arranged alphabetically by corporate names, individuals' names, topics and primarily documents Burnham's mining, oil, and exploration pursuits in Africa and Mexico, especially after the Boer War. The various company, syndicate, land, and mining folders mostly contain correspondence, contracts, and financial transaction records. Occasionally, however, there are reports, written by Burnham or field agents, which provide detailed descriptions of various geographical areas. The Yaqui Project folders document the efforts by Burnham and Hays Hammond to cultivate the Yaqui Valley in Mexico and the difficulties they encountered with the local Indians during the Mexican civil war. The series also documents Burnham's personal interests in such matters as animal importation, the Boy Scouts, and his efforts during World War I to recruit men for a military division headed by former President Theodore Roosevelt (the government rejected Roosevelt's offer to lead a division to France).

b. 9, f. 1 - 3	Animal conservation and importation A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy. See also: Oversize Box 25	1905-1911
b. 9, f. 4 - 5	Banda Syndicate	1901-1904
b. 9, f. 6	Bardeen Oil Company	1919-1924
b. 9, f. 7	Belingive Development Syndicate	1911
b. 9, f. 8 - 11	Boy Scouts of America	1931-1947
b. 9, f. 12 - 13	British South Africa Company	1890-1911
b. 10, f. 14	Burnham Exploration Company	1924-1933
b. 10, f. 15 - 18	Carmichael, John Gordon [primarily correspondence between Carmichael and H. Rider Haggard, and Carmichael manuscripts]	1894-1897, n.d
b. 10, f. 19	Chilean gold mines	1916-1918
b. 10, f. 20	Chinese expeditions	1898-1907
	East Africa Syndicate	
b. 10, f. 21 - 23	Correspondence	1902-1920
b. 10, f. 24	Contracts	1902-1912
b. 10, f. 25	Reports	1904-1920, undated
b. 10, f. 26	Miscellaneous	1898-1903, undated
b. 10, f. 27	Elephant hunting	1903
b. 10, f. 28	Guggenheim Exploration Company	1905-1906
	Hammond, John Hays	
b. 10, f. 29	Clippings	1913-1936

Hammond, John Hays (continued)

b. 10, f. 30	Correspondence [re: Secretary of Commerce campaign]	1921
b. 10, f. 31	Correspondence [re: Secretary of Interior campaign]	1923
b. 11, f. 32	International Petroleum Company	1911-1919
b. 11, f. 33	La Caridad Mines	1906
	Louisiana oil interests	
b. 11, f. 34	General	1920-1921
b. 11, f. 35	Letterbook	1920
b. 11, f. 36	Macomber museum collection	1940-1944
b. 11, f. 37	Manganese Company of California	1916-1917
b. 11, f. 38	Manganese properties	1917
	Map [Bloemfontein, South Africa; hand-drawn map and handwritten battle report on verso] See: Oversize Box 25	1900
b. 11, f. 39	Mexican Seaboard Oil Company	1922-1924
b. 11, f. 40 - 42	Mexican Southern Mining Syndicate	1905-1908
	Mining	
b. 11, f. 43	Consultants	1909-1921, 1937
b. 11, f. 44	Maps See also: Oversize Box 26	1900, undated
	Reports	
b. 11, f. 45	Mexico	1904-1906
b. 11, f. 46	United States	1907-1921
b. 11, f. 47	Moulton Irrigated Lands Company	1917
b. 11, f. 48	National Rifle Association	1942-1943
b. 11, f. 49	Pao Verde Valley lands	1916-1920
b. 12, f. 50	Redfield Mines	1911-1916
b. 12, f. 51	Rhodes, Cecil [writings about Rhodes, probably by Burnham]	undated
b. 12, f. 52	Richardson Construction Company A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1921-1922
	Riverbend Ranch [Burnham's ranch on the San Joaquin River]	

Riverbend Ranch [Burnham's ranch on the San Joaquin River] (continued)

b. 12, f. 53 - 54	Contracts	1911-1920
b. 12, f. 55 - 57	Correspondence	1915-1921
	Riverside County Real Estate	
b. 12, f. 58	Correspondence	1916-1920
b. 12, f. 59	Financial	1913-1921
b. 12, f. 60	Rocky Mountain Club	undated
	Roosevelt, Theodore [re: attempts to raise an Army division to fight in World War I]	
b. 12, f. 61	Applications	undated
b. 12, f. 62	Clippings	1914, 1917, 1919, undated
b. 12, f. 63 - 65	Correspondence	1917
b. 13, f. 66	Scouting [writings by Burnham] A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	undated
b. 13, f. 67	Sonora lands, Mexico A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1906-1909
b. 13, f. 68	Southwest Museum	1944-1945
b. 13, f. 69	Tungsten mining	1916
b. 13, f. 70 - 71	Wa Syndicate	1901
b. 13, f. 72	Western Mexico Development Syndicate	1906-1910, undated
b. 13, f. 73	Wheeler Land Company	1909-1921
b. 13, f. 74 - 75	Yaqui Land and Water Company A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1906-1917
b. 13, f. 76 - 79	Yaqui project A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1908-1941

Series III: Writings, 1893-1946

This series is comprised of Frederick Burham's various writings, published and unpublished. The Deletions folder under *Taking Chances*, and the Articles contain writings about American Indians, scouting, hunting, and several interesting individuals he met on his explorations.

<i>Scouting on Two Continents</i>		
b. 14, f. 1 - 4	Typescript A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	undated
b. 14, f. 5	Dust covers	undated
<i>Taking Chances</i>		
b. 14, f. 6 - 8	Typescript	undated
b. 15, f. 9	Deletions	1943, undated
b. 15, f. 10	Articles	1896-1946, undated
Journals		
b. 15, f. 11	Northern vs. southern exploration A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	undated
b. 15, f. 12	"Trek to Victoria" English	1893
b. 16	Africa [includes clippings]	1893
b. 17, f. 13-16	Speeches	1922-1939, undated

Series IV: Family and Personal Papers, 1879-1951

The series is arranged alphabetically, by name of family member. The most informative materials are the diaries of John Blick and Frederick (which should be used in conjunction with his journals in the Writings series), which detail African expeditions. The diary of Rebecca Burnham (Frederick's mother) mostly describes her social life in California and England during the years 1895 and 1896.

Blick, John Charles		
b. 18, f. 1	General	1921-1922, undated
b. 18, f. 2	Diary [West Africa mining expedition]	1901
b. 18, f. 3	Burnham, Blanche Blick [diary, few entries; passport; teaching certificates] A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy. See also: Oversize Box 25	1879-1938, undated
Burnham, Frederick Russell		
b. 18, f. 4	Address book	1929
b. 18, f. 5 - 6	Biographical [articles about Burnham, including obituaries]	1895-1951, undated
Condolences [cards and letters written upon his death]		
b. 18, f. 7 - 9	General	1947-1948, undated
b. 19, f. 10 - 11	General	1947-1948, undated
b. 19, f. 12	Boy Scouts of America	1947
b. 19, f. 13	Burnham family	1947
b. 19, f. 14	Southwest Museum	1947-1948
b. 19, f. 15	Diary [typescripts] A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1893, 1895, n.d
b. 19, f. 16 - 17	Financial	1895-1921
b. 20, f. 18	Legal	1895-1939, undated
Memorabilia		
b. 20, f. 19	General See also: Oversize Box 25	1898-1935, undated

Burnham, Frederick Russell > Memorabilia (continued)

b. 21	African[?] [artifacts: scale and weights; bracelets; plaque; geological fragments; small carvings]	undated
b. 22, f. 20	Boy Scouts of America [Award of the Silver Buffalo]	1936
b. 22, f. 21	Freemasonry [includes certificate]	1898
b. 22, f. 22	Military	1900-1904
b. 22, f. 23	Notebooks	1920, undated
b. 22, f. 24	Passport	1935
b. 22, f. 25	Burnham, Mather Howard [re: estate]	1920-1922, undated
b. 22, f. 26	Burnham, Rebecca [diaries kept in California and England] A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1895-1896
b. 22, f. 27	Ingram, Pearl [claims agreements]	1895
	Unidentified	
b. 22, f. 28	Notebooks	undated
b. 22, f. 29	Notes	undated
b. 22, f. 30	Trip book [probably by Burnham]	1935

Series V: Photographs, Circa 1893-1924

The series is arranged in two sections: people and places. Both sections contain quite good photographs of the geography, animal life, and native inhabitants of Africa and Mexico, although some of the photographs in the Yaqui folders are fading.

People

b. 23, f. 1	Blick, John [trip in Mexico, includes landscape photographs]	1908
b. 23, f. 2	Burnham, Frederick Russell [portrait]	undated
	Wilson's Patrol See: Oversize Box 25	Circa 1893

Places

b. 23, f. 3	"African Life" [album, includes photographs of Kaffir men and women, Massai warriors, Boer War military encampments, and wildlife]	undated
b. 23, f. 4	Australia	1924
b. 23, f. 5	East Africa	1902-1903
b. 23, f. 6	West Africa	1901
b. 24, f. 7 - 17	Yaqui, Mexico	1907, undated

Oversize

b. 25 Oversize materials

f. 26 Maps

Accession 2012-M-057: Additional Material, 1894-1941

b. 1	Scrapbook	1894-1930
b. 2	Yosemite National Park <i>1 Film Reel (16mm)</i> Original audiovisual materials, as well as preservation and duplicating masters, may not be played. Researchers must consult use copies, or if none exist must pay for a use copy, which is retained by the repository. Researchers wishing to obtain an additional copy for their personal use should consult Copying Services information on the Manuscripts and Archives web site.	Undated
b. 3	Cabeza Prieta Wildlife Park scrapbook	1941
b. 4, f. 1	Photographs and drawings	1894-1930
b. 4, f. 2	Notaria del Lic. Ignacio Razon	1907
b. 4, f. 3	News clippings	1908-1927
b. 4, f. 4	<i>Focus on Rhodesia</i> English	1976
b. 4, f. 5	Roderick Burnham drawings	Undated

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Explorers -- Africa

Geographic Names

Africa

Africa -- Discovery and exploration

Occupations

Explorers

Names

Burnham, Frederick Russell, 1861-1947