



BHC-MSS 0182
Guide to the Papers of Henry A. House
by Meg Rinn
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: House, Henry A.

Title: Papers of Henry A. House

Dates: 1860-1927

Quantity: 1 linear foot, 2 ½ manuscript boxes

Abstract Born in Brooklyn in 1840, Henry Alonzo House lived most of his life in Bridgeport, dying in the city on December 17, 1930. A consummate inventor, he filed for patent after patent in diverse industries, and created the earliest known steam powered automobile in 1866. At his death, he had taken out approximately 300 patents for everything from button hole machines to paper cups to shredded wheat, reflecting diversity and ingenuity.

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical History:

Born in Brooklyn in 1840, Henry Alonzo House lived most of his life in Bridgeport, dying in the city on December 17, 1930. A consummate inventor, he filed for patent after patent in diverse industries. He created an automatic button hole machine (taken over by the Bridgeport based Wheeler and Wilson Manufacturing Company and incredibly important for creating Union Army uniforms during the Civil War), a knitting machine, paper products, and even shredded wheat.

What House is best known for is one of, if not the earliest documented automobile, created in 1866. Powered by a boiler from a fire engine, this retrofitted wagon carriage boasted a 12 horsepower steam engine, and ran down the streets of Bridgeport. While it would take some time for the idea to catch on (and Bridgeport based manufacturer Locomobile Company of America would make steam cars for a time in the early 1900s), it is a remarkable first and reflects House's diverse variety of interests.

House remained an active inventor for much of his life. He helped create early paper plates and cups, and continued his abiding interest in transportation with inventions for boats and for aeronautics. By the time of his death, he had approximately 300 patents to his name.

Scope and Content note:

The material within this collection is entirely focused on patents, which make up the bulk of the material. scrapbook in series II contains aeronautic and aviation related clippings for a finite period of time, allowing for documentation of changes and discoveries of early flight.

Arrangement Note:

Series I contains patents, with all but one folder containing patents granted by the United States of America. Series II contains additional material related to House's works and interest, including a clippings scrapbook of aviation from 1888-1890.

Administrative information:

Provenance: Unknown

Preferred Citation:

Papers of Henry A. House (BHC-MSS 0182), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

Names and Subject Tracings

Personal names

House, Henry A.

Subject tracings

Automobiles

Aeronautics

Packaging

Patents

Transportation

Detailed box/folder listing

Box 1

Series I, patents

1. Patents, 1860-1870
2. Patents, 1871-1878
3. Patents, 1879-1881
4. Patents, 1880-1888
5. Patents, 1887-1913
6. Patents, 1887-1913

Box 2

1. Patents, 1889-1894
2. Patents, 1895-1897
3. Patents, 1895-1897
4. Patents, 1896
5. Patents, 1914-1923
6. Patents, 1914-1923
7. Patents, 1924-1927

Box 3

1. Patents not in House's name but related to his work 1887, 1882, 1891, 1927, 1907, 1919, 1923

Series II, Additional material

2. Aerial Navigation [talk given at YMCA], undated
3. Aviation scrapbook, 1888-1890
4. Correspondence, undated
5. Warrantee deed, February 1, 1866

