

A Guide to the Sydney B. Williamson Papers 1909-1939  
Collection Number mss 00206  
A Collection in  
Virginia Military Institute Archives



**Contact Information:**

Preston Library  
Virginia Military Institute  
Lexington, Virginia 24450-0304  
USA  
Phone: (540) 464-7566  
Fax: (540) 464-7089  
Email: [archives@vmi.edu](mailto:archives@vmi.edu)  
URL: <http://www.vmi.edu/archives/>

Processed by: Diane B. Jacob

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**Administrative Information**

**Access**

There are no restrictions.

**Use Restrictions**

There are no restrictions.

**Preferred Citation**

Sydney B. Williamson Papers, mss 00206, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, Virginia.

### **Acquisition Information**

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

### **Descriptive Summary**

Repository: Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute

Accession number: mss 00206

Title: Sydney B. Williamson Papers 1909-1939

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

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.

### **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in detail the massive task of constructing the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks; many of these photographs are unpublished.

### **Biographical/Historical Information**

#### **Chronology**

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 1865<br>April 15 | Sydney Bacon Williamson born at Lexington, Virginia  |
| 1884             | Graduated from the Virginia Military Institute with a degree in Civil Engineering  |
| 1884-<br>1886    | Mathematics instructor at Kings Mountain (North Carolina) military school  |
| 1886-<br>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- Engaged by U.S. Army corps of engineers to determine damages done by

1935 Mississippi flood control program and to testify before courts  
1939  
January Died at Lexington, Virginia  
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