# **Guide to the Papers of Norbert Wiener** MC.0022

Finding aid prepared by Mary Jane McCavitt

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# **Table of Contents**

<u>Summary Information</u> 3
Biography
Scope and Contents of the Collection.
Arrangement of Collection
Administrative Information16
Related Materials
Controlled Access Headings
Bibliography20
Alphabetical List of Writings
<u>List of Collaborators</u>
<u>Index of Correspondence</u>
Collection Inventory
<u>Correspondence</u>
Biographical and Personal Information. 74
Student Notes, Professional Writings and Lectures
Incoming Scientific Correspondence, Lectures, and Reports

## **Summary Information**

**Repository** Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Institute Archives and Special

Collections

Creator Wiener, Norbert, 1894-1964

Title Norbert Wiener papers

**Date [inclusive]** 1898-1966

**Extent** 24.0 cubic feet in 71 manuscript boxes, 1 half manuscript box

**Language** English

**Abstract** This collection documents the career of Norbert Wiener. Wiener was a

member of the faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1919 to 1960 in the Department of Mathematics, and was a leader in the field of cybernetics. The material in this collection includes biographical information, correspondence, course material, manuscripts, and reprints.

#### Citation

Norbert Wiener Papers, MC 22, box X. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Institute, Archives and Special Collections, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

# **Biography**

Norbert Wiener was a world renowned mathematician who was instrumental in the development of communication and control theories. He coined the word "cybernetics" to describe this new science.

There are a number of autobiographical and biographical sources available that provide an in-depth treatment of Wiener's life. Because the bulk of the collection is arranged chronologically, a chronology of Wiener's life is supplied in lieu of a brief biography.

Chronology	
1894 November 26	Norbert Wiener was born in Columbia, Missouri to
	Bertha Kahn Wiener and Leo Wiener, a professor of
	foreign languages at the University of Missouri.
1895	The Wiener family moved to Cambridge,
	Massachusetts, where Leo Wiener became a
	professor of Slavic languages at Harvard.
1898	Wiener's sister Constance Wiener (Franklin) was
	born.
1901	The Wiener family visited Europe.
	Wiener entered the third grade at the Peabody
	School; after quickly advancing to the fourth grade,
	he was removed from the school by Leo Wiener.
	Except for this brief experience, Wiener was taught
	by his father until he entered high school.
1902	Wiener's sister Bertha Wiener (Dodge) was born
1903	Wiener entered Ayer High School.
1906	Wiener graduated from Ayer High School and
	entered Tufts College where he studied mathematics
	and biology.
1909	Wiener received an AB degree, cum laude, from
	Tufts and entered Harvard Graduate School to study
	zoology.

1910	Wiener entered the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell University with a scholarship. He studied with Frank Thilly, Walter A. Hammond, and Ernest Albee.
1911	Wiener transferred to Harvard Graduate School to study philosophy. He studied with Edward V. Huntington, Josiah Royce, G. H. Palmer, Karl Schmidt, and George Santayana.
1912	Wiener received an MA degree from Harvard.
1913	Wiener received a PhD degree from Harvard. As a John Thornton Kirkland Fellow of Harvard, Wiener studied logic and philosophy with Bertrand Russell, G. H. Hardy, J. E. Littlewood, G. E. Moore, and J. M. E. MacTaggart at Cambridge University.
1914	Continuing as a Kirkland Fellow, Wiener studied mathematics with David Hilbert, Edmund Husserl, and Edmund Landau at Göttengen, Germany.  As a Frederick Sheldon Fellow of Harvard, Wiener returned to Cambridge University to study mathematics and philosophy.  Wiener received the Bowdoin Prize from Harvard.
1915	Because of World War I, Wiener finished his year as a Sheldon Fellow at Columbia University where he studied philosophy and mathematics with John Dewey.
1915-1916	Wiener was appointed an assistant and a docent lecturer in Harvard's Philosophy Department and lectured on the logic of geometry.
1916	Wiener served with Harvard's reserve regiment at the Officer's Training Camp in Plattsburg, New York
1916-1917	As an Instructor of mathematics, Wiener taught at the University of Maine in Orono.
1917	Wiener served with the Cambridge ROTC. Wiener briefly worked as an apprentice engineer in the Turbine Department of the General Electric Corp. in Lynn, Massachusetts

	<b>*</b>
1917-1918	Wiener was employed as a staff writer for the <title render="italic">Encyclopedia Americana</title> in Albany, New York
1918	As a civilian employee, Wiener worked on computations of ballistic tables for the US Army at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, under Oswald Veblen.  Wiener was elected into the American Mathematical Society.
1918-1919	Wiener served as an Army private at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.
1919	Wiener worked as a journalist with the <title render="italic">Boston Herald</title> .
1919-1920	Wiener received an appointment at MIT as instructor of mathematics.
1920	Wiener attended the International Mathematical Congress in Strasbourg as MIT's representative and presented a paper on Brownian Motion. He also visited Cambridge and Paris.
1922	Wiener and Constance Wiener visited London and Paris.
1924	Wiener was promoted to assistant professor of mathematics at MIT.  Wiener and Bertha Wiener visited Portiers and Germany.
1925	Wiener attended the International Mathematical Congress in Grenoble and the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Southampton. He also visited with Richard Courant and Felix Klein in Göttingen.
1926	Wiener was made a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.  Maugeurite Engmann and Wiener were married and visited Switzerland and Italy.
1926-1927	Wiener received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study in Göttingen and in Copenhagen, where

	he collaborated with Harald Bohr. He studied
	haphazard motion, periodogram analysis extensions
	of Fourier series and Fourier integral theory
	and taught a course on general trigonometry
	developments at Göttingen.
1928	Wiener's daughter Barbara was born.
	Wiener spoke at the Symposium on Analysis Situs
	for the American Mathematical Society meeting.
1929	Wiener's daughter Margaret was born.
	Wiener was promoted to associate professor of
	mathematics at MIT.
1929-1930	Wiener taught at Brown University as an exchange
	professor.
1930-1936	Wiener and Yuk Wing Lee developed and patented
	electrical network systems.
1931-1932	Wiener went to Cambridge University as a visiting
	lecturer; presented lectures on the Fourier Integral
	and its applications at Trinity College.
1932	Wiener was promoted to professor of mathematics at
	MIT.
	Wiener was MIT representative at the International
	Congress of Mathematics, Zurich.
1933	<title render="italic">The Fourier Integral and&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;Certain of Its Applications</title> was published.
	Wiener was awarded Bôcher Prize by the American
	Mathematical Society; lectured on Brownian Motion
	at the annual meeting. Wiener was elected to the
	National Academy of Sciences.
	Wiener began participation in interdisciplinary
	seminar group at Harvard Medical School.
	Wiener collaborated with R. E. A. C. Paley.
1934	<title render="italic">Fourier Transforms in the&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;Complex Domain</title> was published.
	Wiener delivered the American Mathematical
	Society Colloquium Lectures at Williamstown,

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1935	Wiener lectured at Stanford University and in Japan
	on his way to China.
1935-1936	Wiener was a visiting professor at Tsing Hua
	University in Peiping, China.
1936	Wiener attended the International Congress of
	Mathematicians in Oslo, Norway, and lectured on
	Tauberian Gap Theorems.
1936-1937	Wiener collaborated with Harry Ray Pitt at MIT.
1937	Wiener gave the Dohme lecture at Johns Hopkins on
	Tauberian Theorems.
1938	Wiener lectured on analysis at the Semi centennial
	of the American Mathematical Society.
1940	Wiener served as chief consultant in the field of
	mechanical and electrical aids to computation for the
	National Defence Research Committee.
1940-1945	Wiener was associated with the NDRC's Office of
	Scientific Research and Development, Statistical
	Research Group and Operational Research
	Laboratory at Columbia University. He was part
	of an interdisciplinary team at MIT studying the
	mathematical aspects of guidance and control of anti
	aircraft fire. Wiener worked on the design of fire
	control apparatus for anti aircraft guns with Julian
	Bigelow.
1941	Wiener resigned from the National Academy of
	Sciences.
1945	Wiener participated in a study group set up by
	John von Neumann and attended a meeting held in
	Princeton on communication theory.
	Wiener collaborated with Arturo Rosenblueth
	at the Instituto National Cardiologia in Mexico
	and attended the Mexican Mathematical Society's
	Conference held in Guadalajara.
1946-1950	Wiener and Arturo Rosenblueth received a five year
	Rockefeller Foundation Grant that allowed them

	to collaborate in Mexico and at MIT on alternating years.
1946	Wiener received an Honorary ScD degree from Tufts College.  Wiener attended the first three Josiah Macy Jr.  Foundation Conferences and the Conference on Teleological Mechanisms sponsored by the New York Academy of Sciences.  Wiener lectured at the National University of Mexico.  Wiener worked with Mark Kac and Arturo Rosenblueth at MIT.
1947	Wiener visited England and France and gave lectures on harmonic analysis in Nancy, France.  Wiener collaborated with Rosenblueth at the Instituto Nacional de Cardiologia in Mexico.
1948	<title render="italic">Cybernetics</title> was published.  Wiener delivered a talk at the American  Mathematical Society's Second Symposium on Applied Mathematics.
1949	Wiener received the Lord & Taylor American Design Award. <title render="italic">Extrapolation, Interpolation, and Smoothing of Stationary Time Series with Engineering Applications</title> was published. Wiener delivered the American Mathematical Society's Josiah Willard Gibbs Lecture at the annual meeting. Wiener collaborated with Rosenblueth in Mexico.
1950	<title render="italic">The Human Use of Human&lt;br&gt;Beings</title> was published. Wiener attended the Seventh Macy Conference. Wiener delivered a talk at the International Congress of Mathematicians at Harvard University.

1951	Wiener taught at the University of Paris, College de France, under a Fulbright Teaching Fellowship and gave lectures in Madrid.
1951-1952	Wiener collaborated with Rosenblueth in Mexico and received an honorary ScD degree from the University of Mexico.
1952	Wiener received the Alvarega Prize from the College of Physicians in Philadelphia.  Wiener gave the Forbes Hawks lectures at the University of Miami.
1953	<title render="italic">Ex-Prodigy</title> was published. Wiener delivered lectures on the theory of prediction at the University of California at Los Angeles. Wiener taught a summer school course with Claude Shannon and Robert Fano titled Mathematical Problems of Communications Theory.
1954	Wiener went on a lecture tour of India and attended the Indian Science Congress in Hyderabad. Wiener taught summer course Mathematical Problems of Communication Theory again.
1955-1956	Wiener became a visiting professor at the Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta.
1956	<title render="italic">I Am A Mathematician</title> was published.  Wiener went on a lecture tour of Japan on his way back from India and then taught a summer school course at UCLA.
1957	Wiener received an honorary ScD degree from Grinnell College.  Wiener was awarded the Virchow Medal from the Rudolf Virchow Medical Society.
1958	<title render="italic">Nonlinear Problems in&lt;br&gt;Random Theory</title> was published. Wiener taught at the Varenna Summer School in Italy.

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1959	<title render="italic">The Tempter</title> was
	published.
	Wiener taught a summer school course at UCLA.
	Wiener was made an Institute Professor at MIT.
1960	Wiener taught at the University of Naples in Italy
	and visited the United Soviet Socialist Republic.
	Wiener received the ASTME Research Medal.
	Wiener retired from MIT, becoming Institute
	Professor Emeritus.
1961	<title render="italic">Harmonic Analysis &lt;/&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;title&gt;was published.&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;Wiener taught a summer school course at UCLA.&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;1962&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;Wiener taught at the Institute of Theoretical Physics,&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;University of Naples, Italy.&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;Wiener delivered the Terry Lectures at Yale&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td rowspan=2&gt;&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;University; they were titled "Prolegomena to&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;Theology."&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;1963&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;Wiener taught a summer school course at UCLA.&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;1964&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;&lt;title render="italic"&gt;God and Golem, Inc</title> .
	was published (based upon the Terry Lectures).
	Wiener received the National Medal of Science from
	President Johnson.
	Wiener went to Amsterdam as a visiting professor
	and as the honorary head of Neurocybernetics at
	Netherlands Central Institute for Brain Research.
	He also lectured in Norway and Sweden.
1964 March 18	Wiener died in Stockholm, Sweden.
1965	<title render="italic">God and Golem, Inc.</title>
	received the National Book Award.
1966	<title render="italic">Differential Space, Quantum&lt;/td&gt;&lt;/tr&gt;&lt;tr&gt;&lt;td&gt;&lt;/td&gt;&lt;td&gt;Systems and Prediction</title> was published.

#### Activities

American Association of Arts and Sciences - Member

American Institute of Electrical Engineers - Applied Mathematics Subcommittee

American Mathematical Society - Council member, 1938; vice-president, 1936-1937

Appalachian Mountain Club - Member

Benjamin Franklin Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce

Black Mountain College - Board of Trustees

College Entrance Examination Board - Commission on Examinations in Mathematics, 1934-1935

Econometric Society - Member

Friends of China - Advisory Board, 1935

International Association for Cybernetics - Member

International Congress of Mathematicians, 1940 - Organizing Committee, Committee on Invitation of Speakers and Head of Conference Committee in Probability and the Theory of Integration

International Congress of Mathematicians, 1950 - Organizing Committee and Entertainment Subcommittee

London Mathematical Society - Member

National Academy of Sciences - Member

New England Committee for Relief in China - Member

Union Matematica - Honorary president

## **Scope and Contents of the Collection**

The Norbert Wiener papers consist primarily of correspondence and manuscripts of writings by Wiener and by others. The collection spans the years 1898 to 1966 with the bulk of the material dating from 1910 to 1963.

From early childhood Wiener was perceived as exceptional, and this perception in part explains the large amount of material from his youth in the collection. Writings from his high school years and early correspondence with his family were retained and can be found in the collection.

In 1910, when Wiener was sixteen, he was away from his family for the first time. The correspondence between Wiener and his family began at this time, when he was attending Cornell University. He wrote his sisters and parents affectionate letters in Latin, German, French, and English while he was studying at Cornell and later at Cambridge University, the University of Göttingen, and Columbia University. The family letters continue during his first work experiences with the Encyclopedia Americana in Albany, New York, the University of Maine in Orono, and at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland where he

worked for Oswald Veblen. These letters chronicle Wiener's academic progress, interests, and perceptions of the places that he lived. There are few personal letters from Wiener to his family after 1926, the year of his marriage. While the collection does contain letters from his parents and sisters to Wiener, most are from Wiener to his family.

During his early years, most of Wiener's letters were addressed to his father, Leo Wiener, and this correspondence shows the close relationship between father and son. Until Wiener entered high school, his father taught him, and Leo Wiener continued to play an influential part in his education and early professional life. Leo Wiener was a Harvard philologist and Wiener's letters usually inquire about the progress of Leo Wiener's latest project or ask advice for dealing with criticism of his father's work. The letters also ask and comment upon advice from Leo Wiener. At the age of twenty-three, Wiener asked permission of his father to join the Army. It was due to his father's suggestion that Wiener started to write popular as well as scientific articles (see letter of January 12, 1918).

Other material in the collection from Wiener's childhood and youth further illustrates his intellectual development. Series 3 contains his senior essay from Ayer High School and some of his college notebooks. His earliest notebooks concern a variety of subjects yet they often have doodles and mathematical problems in them as well. A number of his graduate philosophy essays plus drafts and worksheets for his Harvard PhD thesis are also available. Published and unpublished articles written at Cambridge and Göttingen start to reflect Wiener's transition from philosopher and logician to mathematician (Series 3). Other information about Wiener's youth is in Series 2, which includes Army records, grades from Tufts College, and graduation programs from Ayer High School, Tufts, and Harvard.

Although the earliest records in the collection are letters from Wiener to his family, the letters from 1926 to 1934 are primarily from friends and colleagues to Wiener. From 1934 on, more copies of Wiener's responses follow incoming letters so that the collection provides a more complete historical perspective.

During his post-graduate days at Cambridge University, Wiener started to correspond with his fellow students from Harvard and Cambridge, even though they were several years older. While in Cambridge he received a few letters from another Harvard philosophy fellow who was studying at Oxford, T. S. Eliot. Wiener also corresponded with some of his professors including Bertrand Russell and G. H. Hardy. For Wiener's wedding present, another professor, E. V. Huntington, sent a "... set of postulates" (see letter of March 15, 1926, in folder 28).

The material added by the family in 1994 includes information about Margaret Wiener and family photographs.

In the correspondence dated 1920 and later, professional correspondence is dominant. Also, as Wiener's scholarly reputation grew, the bulk of his correspondence increased. Because of his varied interests and worldwide travel, Wiener corresponded with a large community of scholars and scientists, often on a personal as well as a professional level. Prominent correspondents represented in the collection include Harald Bohr, Max Born, Jacob Bronowski, Albert Einstein, R. G. D. Richardson, J. D. Tamarkin, Piet Hein, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Grey Walter. Because of the large number of prominent correspondents, a selective index is included in this finding aid.

Wiener's development as a mathematician is illustrated in the correspondence and through Wiener's writings. A December 1931 letter from J. D. Tamarkin, for example, discusses all the errors that Wiener made in his seminal work, "Tauberian Theorems." The gradual development of information theory and

cybernetics can be traced through letters from the 1940s, especially through correspondence with Arturo Rosenblueth, John von Neumann, Warren S. McCullock and other investigators of the new science. The exchange of opinions on mathematical problems in Wiener's correspondence sometimes served as a sounding board for future articles. While Wiener often worked alone, he also depended upon his colleagues' ideas. The majority of Wiener's collaborative efforts were with fellow mathematicians such as Aurel Wintner, Dirk Jan Struik, and Max Born. Wiener's letters emphasize the fruitful results that occurred from the lengthy collaborations that he had with H. R. Pitt and R. E. A. C. Paley.

Wiener's interest in applied mathematics and interdisciplinary science resulted in his collaboration with scientists in many fields. Series 3 contains some of the published and unpublished works that Wiener wrote with his colleagues, and Series 1 further documents his collaborative efforts. During World War II, Wiener worked with a young engineer, Julian Bigelow, for the National Defence Research Committee (NDRC) on a fire control apparatus for anti-aircraft guns, and some of their progress is documented in the correspondence for that period. After the war, Wiener's work with biologists, physiologists, and other medical doctors, as well as with engineers, expanded. His best known work was with the noted physiologist Arturo Rosenblueth. The collection contains numerous letters between them and some of their writings including *Dynamics of the Nervous System*, an unpublished book (see folders 606-608). Series 1 and 3 also include material about encephalography from the work of Wiener and scientists at Massachusetts General Hospital such as Doctors John Barlow and Mollie Brazier. Wiener became increasingly involved in developing prosthetic devices with the help of his medical and engineering colleagues. Not all of Wiener's collaborative efforts resulted in a joint paper; many of his individual speeches and articles depended upon information that he gained from others, a fact that Wiener always made clear.

Students and colleagues sent Wiener manuscripts and reprints of their own works in order to receive his opinion. These writings are in Series 4. Many of the scientists who collaborated with Wiener are represented in this section, for example, R. E. A. C. Paley, Pesi Masani, Walter Pitts, Joseph Doob, and Armand Siegel. Another way that Wiener expressed his opinion about his colleagues' works was through the many book reviews he wrote (see Series 3).

While the collection does not contain all of Wiener's written work, it has a great deal of the earliest and the latest work. The writings in Series 3 start to become sparse in the 1920s, and large gaps continue until 1948. Because approximately half of the writings were unpublished, a unique view of Wiener's work is provided by the collection. The unpublished writings include various types of works, such as a lecture titled, "Mathematical Problems of Communication Theory" (folder 734), a speech on "The Computing Machine and Form (Gestalt)" (folder 665), and a memorandum on the scope of a suggested computing machine (folder 558). Further insights can be gained from the collection's published works that progress from the early draft stage to the final reprint. The progression of Wiener's theories can be interpreted throughout his writings. For example, after *Cybernetics* was published in 1948, cybernetics became a recurring topic in his writings, both in published articles and in unpublished speeches and articles. By 1952, Wiener was writing a treatise on cybernetics based upon the work that had been done in the area over the last five years (see folders 685 and 730). He was constantly called upon to define cybernetics, but his definitions did not remain static. The implications and applications of cybernetics expanded over the years, and in 1958 Wiener delivered a speech on "The Relation of Cybernetics to Semantics" (see folder 830).

Wiener's involvement with interdisciplinary work at MIT started prior to his work in cybernetics. For instance, in a letter to Vannevar Bush he supports the idea of a cooperative scientific institute in the Boston area to be called the Institute for Exact Sciences, which would encompass physics, chemistry, mathematics, and astronomy (see letter of November 21, 1934). In 1941, Wiener was on the Supervisory Committee on the Research Center of Applied Mathematics (see folder 61). Wiener's forty year career at MIT enabled him to delve into different areas. When Wiener was retiring in May 1960, he wrote to thank President Julius Stratton and stated that "everything that I have been able to accomplish has been accomplished here at M.I.T...." (see folder 281).

Wiener's letters and writings show that he continually collaborated with students and faculty members at MIT. Wiener would offer ideas to the Institute's engineering faculty, and they would attempt to apply them, often with good results. In 1950, Wiener mentioned in a speech that he was working on a prosthetic "hearing glove" with Jerome Wiesner. The mail response to this speech was overwhelming; however, Wiesner's and Wiener's work was not yet complete and never succeeded (see also folders 623 and 624). Because of Wiener's close contact with his MIT colleagues, it must be presumed that some of his collaborative efforts do not appear in the collection. The collaborations were often casual and verbal. For example, one gap in the collection is the small number of letters and manuscripts that directly relate to Vannevar Bush's and Wiener's work in the '20s on the Bush differential and analyzer.

His students also often helped Wiener with this scientific work, as the correspondence with Norman Levinson and Jerome Lettvin shows. Another illustration of his work with students can be seen in the extensive correspondence and patent information (Series 2) on the electrical network system developed by Wiener and Yuk Wing Lee. Wiener's willingness to help his former students is also apparent in his correspondence. He gave advice and tried to find jobs for many of his students and young colleagues. A December 18, 1941, letter to the director of scientific personnel at the National Research Council suggested the development of more NDRC projects in order to utilize the talents of young mathematicians who were jobless. Some of his students eventually joined the MIT faculty; for example, Yuk Wing Lee, Norman Levinson, and Jerome Lettvin. The collection is remarkable for the view of Wiener's personality that emerges. Wiener often exchanged ideas on non-scientific subjects with his colleagues in his correspondence. Wiener was increasingly alarmed by the world situation and his letters often reflect his concern. Before World War II, Wiener's letters showed his efforts to place scholars who had lost their positions because of political and social unrest. Two examples are Antonio Zygmund and Yuk Wing Lee. He was a member of such organizations as the Emergency Committee in the Aid of Displaced German Scholars and the China Aid Society. He also wrote several essays about the predicament of German scholars (see especially folders 537 and 543).

After World War II, Wiener felt that many scientists were evading their responsibility to the modern world. He wrote to such friends as Arturo Rosenblueth and J. B. S. Haldane about these social problems. His letters show a consistent refusal to do any work that might be used by the military after the War. In addition, Wiener wrote popular articles about science and society. The best known article was "A Scientist Rebels" (see folder 573); it and similar articles evoked letters of support from both scientists and laymen.

Wiener's concern with the ramifications of his scientific work was not limited to the military. He exchanged letters and met with Walter Reuther in order to discuss his fears of future unemployment when the automatic factory became operative. Articles that explained automatization and some of its social effects are also included in Wiener's writings (Series 3). During his last fifteen years he became

increasingly involved with the development of prosthetic devices and with other health-related problems. While refusing to work for the military, he was always ready to assist the Veteran's Administration.

From the writing of "Unconventionality" (folder 494) in 1918 at his father's suggestion, Wiener never gave up popular writing. Cybernetics had unexpectedly caught the public's eye. Wiener's correspondence markedly increased after its publication in 1948, and many letters were from strangers who wanted to know more about Wiener and his philosophy. This increase in "fan mail" was noted by his publishers who encouraged Wiener to write more popular articles and books. From the correspondence, it appears that Wiener enjoyed a friendly relationship with Henry Simon of Simon and Schuster and with Jason Epstein of Doubleday and Company, Inc. The collection contains book drafts from a number of his works, including *The Human Use of Human Beings* (folders 639-653a.) and an unpublished book called *The Philosophy of Invention* (folders 752-757).

Wiener was also interested in writing's entertainment value. He wrote science fiction, novels and two autobiographies. Some of his ventures were not successful. He wrote to Orson Welles on June 28, 1941, suggesting a movie plot that was rejected but that eventually led to his own book *The Tempter* (folders 839-861). With Jason Epstein's encouragement, Wiener and Isaac Asimov tried to write a science fiction story which never came to fruition.

Like all celebrities, Wiener received some crank mail and articles (see Series 4) from people who hoped that he shared their beliefs. The word that he coined, "cybernetics," became vulgarized in the 1950s and Wiener was erroneously identified with social movements and thoughts that he knew nothing about. For example, many people thought that Wiener founded the Dianetics movement (which later became the Church of Scientology). The true founder, L. Ron Hubbard, did not discourage this belief for a while because Wiener was a valuable, albeit false, ally (see correspondence for 1950-1951). For the most part, Wiener's "fan mail" consisted of letters of admiration to which Wiener often replied.

Materials received from Mrs. Margaret E. Wiener in 1971 consist of 35 volumes of foreign language editions of Wiener's books, nine audio tapes of colloquiums and lectures given by Wiener; and a motion picture film of a Japanese television interview of Norbert and Margaret Wiener.

## **Arrangement of Collection**

This collection is organized into four series: Series 1. Correspondence; Series 2. Biographical and Personal Information; Series 3. Student Notes, Professional Writings, and Lectures; Series 4. Incoming Scientific Correspondence, Lectures, and Reports.

## **Administrative Information**

#### **Publication Information**

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2009

#### Access note

The collection is open for research.

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#### **Processing Information**

This collection was processed by Mary Jane McCavitt in September 1980. Processing of the collection was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## **Related Materials**

#### **Related Materials**

Supplementary material to the Norbert Wiener papers may be found at the MIT Archives in the records of the Office of the President and of the Provost. Papers dealing with the development of cybernetics may also be found in the Warren Sturgis McCulloch Papers at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. Other collections of possible interest are the Alan Tower Waterman Papers and the Oswald Veblen Papers, both in the Library of Congress Manuscript Division. Some notebooks and papers of Leo Wiener are located at the Harvard University Archives.

## **Controlled Access Headings**

**Corporate Name(s)** 

- American Association for the Advancement of Science
- American Mathematical Society
- Institute of Radio Engineers
- International Association for Cybernetics
- Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation
- M.I.T. Press
- United States. Veterans Administration

#### **Function(s)**

• Institute Professor.

#### Personal Name(s)

- Akutowicz, E. J.
- Barlow, John S., 1925-
- Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980
- Bigelow, Julian Himely
- Bohr, Harald August, 1887-1851
- Born, Max, 1882-1970
- Bronowski, Jacob, 1908-1974
- Buerger, Martin Julian, 1903-
- Bush, Vannevar, 1890-1974
- Caianiello, Eduardo R., 1921-
- Cartwright, Mary Lucy
- Chao, Yuen Ren, 1892-1982
- Compton, K. T. (Karl Taylor), 1887-1954
- Conklin, Groff, 1904-1968
- De Santillana, Giorgio, 1902-
- Deutsch, Karl Wolfgang, 1912-
- Doob, Joseph L.
- Einstein, Albert, 1879-1955
- Epstein, Jason
- Fréchet, Maurice, 1878-
- Galdston, Iago, 1895-
- Gurland, John, 1917-
- Hadamard, Jacques, 1865-1963
- Hardy, G. H. (Godfrey Harold), 1877-1947
- Hein, Piet, 1905-1996
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- Hoagland, Hudson, 1899-1982

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- Ikehara, Shikao, 1904-1984
- Kac, Mark
- Kallen, Horace Meyer, Horace Meyer, 1882-1974
- Killian, James Rhyne, 1904-1988
- Kissinger, Henry, 1923-
- Kline, John Robert, 1891-1955
- Korzybski, Alfred, 1879-1950
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- Mandelbrojt, Szolem, 1899-
- Martin, William Ted, 1911-
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- Mead, Margaret, 1901-1978
- Moe, Henry Allen, 1894-1975
- Morison, Robert S., 1906-
- · Muscio, Bernard
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- · Raisbeck, Gordon
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- Sandoval Vallarta, Manuel, 1899-1977
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- · Siegel, Armand
- Stone, Marshall H. (Marshall Harvey), 1903-
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- Vallee, Robert
- Veblen, Oswald, 1880-1960
- Von Neumann, John, 1903-1957
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- Wiener, Leo, 1862-1939
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#### Subject(s)

- Cybernetics--Research.
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## **Alphabetical List of Writings**

Note: The following is an alphabetical list by title of Norbert Wiener's published and unpublished writings. All published works are listed, including those that are not in the Norbert Wiener Papers. The title of each published work is followed by the date of publication; the title of each unpublished work is followed by the date the work was written. Some dates have been supplied by the processor. When the date was unknown the probable time the work was written is indicated by a year (e.g., ca. 1950) or by a span of years (e.g., 1950-1960) whenever possible.

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Analytic Properties of the Characters of Infinite Abelian Groups, 1932.

Analytical Approximations to Topological Transformations, 1926.

The Application of Physics to Medicine, 1960.

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Atomic Knowledge of Good and Evil, 1950.

The Automatic Factory, 1953.

Automatization, 1954.

The Average of an Analytical Functional, 1921.

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A Class of Gap Theorems, 1934.

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Communication and Secrecy in the Modern World, 1950.

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The Contributions of the Known and the Object in the Anatomical Diagram, 1911.

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The Day of the Dead, 1952.

The Decline of Cookbook Engineering, 1938.

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Differential Space, Quantum Systems and Prediction, 1966.

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The Dirichlet Problem, 1924.

Discontinuous Boundary Conditions and the Dirichlet Problem, 1923.

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#### **List of Collaborators**

Note: Norbert Wiener's co-authors are listed alphabetically below with the title of the article and the date. Both published and unpublished writings are included.

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## **Index of Correspondence**

## Name(s)

- Academie Internationale de Philosophie des Science folders 289, 295, 299, 300, 303, 305, 307, 309, 314, 316, 325. See also: Dockx, S. and Frechet, M.
- Ackerman, Adolph J. folder 281
- Acta Mathematica folders 227, 229, 232, 233, 234, 236
- Adams, George P. folder 5
- Adams, L.J. folder 44
- Addison-Wesley Press, Inc. folders 95, 314
- Adeishvili, Shalva folders 312, 322
- Agnew, Ralph P. folders 55, 65
- Ahlfors, Lars V. folders 226, 242
- Aiken, Howard H. folders 72, 75
- Akutowicz, Edwin J. folders 244, 253, 256, 258, 264, 277, 289, 294, 298, 299, 305, 331
- Alduante, Arturo folders 294, 296, 299, 301, 305, 324, 331, 338
- Alexandroff, Paul folder 35
- Aley, Robert folder 13
- Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. folders 90, 210, 297
- Alger, Philip L. folders 106, 108
- Alvarez, Walter C. folders 101, 127, 131
- Ambartsumian, V. folder 322
- Amberson, William R. folder 122
- Ambrose, Warren folders 50, 162, 234
- American Academy of Arts and Sciences folders 28, 106, 107, 108, 111, 113, 116
- American Association for the Advancement of Science folders 50, 61, 62, 74, 77, 83, 85, 106, 111, 122, 176, 186, 202, 217, 262, 269, 272, 315
- American Association of Scientific Workers folder 173
- American Automatic Control Council folder 279
- American Bureau for Medical Aid to China, Inc. folder 60
- American Chemical Society folders 188, 190, 191, 192, 278, 279
- American Foundation for the Blind, Inc. folders 94, 309
- American Friends of the Chinese People folders 51, 57
- American Friends Service Committee folders 97, 210, 211, 213, 256, 261
- American Geophysical Union folder 64
- American Institute of Biological Sciences folder 159
- American Institute of Electrical Engineering folders 106, 108, 112, 114, 121, 124, 125, 139, 176
- American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineering folders 222, 224

- American Institute of Physics folders 164, 165, 333, 336
- American League for Peace and Democracy of Greater Boston folder 50
- American Management Association folders 177, 178, 209
- American Mathematical Monthly folders 45, 46, 128
- American Mathematical Society folders 51, 54, 55, 62, 129, 149, 245, 257, 275, 282, 291, 311, 333
- American Peoples Encyclopedia folders 129, 216
- American Philosophical Association folders 226, 228, 229, 235, 240
- American Physical Society folders 146, 147
- American Psychiatric Association folders 125, 184, 186, 200
- American Scholar folders 73, 75, 139, 140, 141, 217
- American Society for Technion folders 219, 235, 236, 281, 296, 297,301, 313, 314
- American Society of Civil Engineers folder 47
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers folders 98, 99, 136, 150, 154-156, 159, 160, 170, 182, 183, 187
- American Society of Planning Officials folders 191, 193-198, 202
- American Society of Tool Engineers folders 270-274, 276
- American-Soviet Science Society folder 69
- American Statistical Association folders 55, 78, 113, 115, 116, 198
- American Telephone and Telegraph Corporation folder 60
- Ancker, Frances folders 98, 100, 101, 103, 104, 107, 145
- Andermann, K. folders 83, 144
- Anderson, Jack folder 271
- Angel, Ronald W. folders 332, 335
- Annals of Mathematical Statistics folder 219
- Antiaircraft Artillery Board folders 65, 66
- Antweiler, Hermann J. folders 274, 281
- Anwar, Muhammad folder 256
- Applebaum, William folders 272, 277
- Appleyard, Rollo folder 34
- Arbib, Michael folders 309, 310, 311, 313, 326
- Arden House Conference folders 233, 235
- Arguimbau, Lawrence folders 71, 77, 146, 200
- Arthur D. Little, Inc. folders 124, 125, 126
- Artigas Sanz, Lose Antononide folders 136, 137, 139
- Ashby, W. Ross folders 72, 134, 152, 168, 259, 279
- Association for Computing Machinery folders 191, 193
- Association for the Advancement of Exceptional Children, Inc. folder 121
- Association Internationale de Cybernetique folders 226, 229, 234, 236, 240, 242, 243, 245, 246, 247, 249, 262, 280, 284, 285, 294, 296, 303, 316, 336
- Association of Atomic Scientists folder 85
- Association of Scientific Workers of India folders 144, 145
- Atlantic Monthly folders 72, 81, 87, 90, 98, 117, 118, 119, 130
- Attica Prison folder 50
- Aubert, Pierre folder 66
- Aude, H.T.R. folder 45

- Aufbau (Reconstruction) folders 117, 118, 119, 122, 124, 207, 209, 276, 277, 283, 284
- Auger, Raymond N. folder 174
- Authors Guild and Authors League of America, Inc. folders 132, 141, 199, 316, 322
- Avati, Helen folders 107, 280
- Averbuck, Samuel H. folder 40
- Ayer High School folder 71
- Azad, R.S. folder 268
- Babson, R.W. folders 194, 196
- Bachelor, G.K. folder 87
- Bachmann, F. folder 41
- Baddeley, H. folders 227, 228
- Badger, Richard G. folder 38
- Baer, J.A. folder 15
- Baker Street Irregulars folder 194
- Baldwin, Paul H. folders 180, 191, 192
- Banister, E.S. folder 17
- Barankin, Edward W. folders 208, 270, 290
- Barlow, John S. folders 174, 216, 217, 286, 297, 300, 306, 312, 313, 324, 330
- Barnes, G.R. folder 37
- Barr, Joseph S. folders 311, 318, 322, 330
- Barrow, Bruce R. folders 155, 164
- Barss, W.R. folder 28
- Bartlett, Fred folder 12, 17
- Barzun, Jacques folder 120
- Bas, J. Jr folder 49
- Bass, Robert E. folder 132
- Basu, U. P. See: Indian Science Congress Association.
- Bataille, Marie-Louise folders 135, 136
- Bateson, Gregory folders 72, 73, 76, 155, 193, 204, 268, 295, 309
- Beatley, Ralph folder 40
- Beatty, S. folder 51
- Beckenbach, E.F. folders 176, 178, 179, 182
- Behnke, Heinrich folder 193
- Behrend, B.A. folder 34
- Bell, Clifford folders 177, 182, 262
- Bell, E.T. folder 180
- Bell Telephone Laboratories folders 33, 38, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 54, 58, 68, 123
- Bemis, F. Gregg folder 308
- Benes, Jiri folder 297
- Benson-Lehner Corporation folder 118, 153, 181
- Beorse, Bryn folder 303, 304, 306, 318, 319
- Berne, Eric folder 121, 127
- Bernsdorf, Wilhelm folders 276, 277
- Bernstein, Felix folders 38, 41
- Berry, Andrew C. folder 33

- Bers, L. folder 48
- Berwald, L. folders 38, 40
- Bhatnager, K.P. folders 190, 208, 210
- Biberstein, Has H. folders 236, 239
- Bieberbach, L. folder 34
- Bigelow, Edward f. folder 3
- Bigelow, Julian H. folders 60, 61, 64, 66, 76, 114, 131
- Billeter, Ernst P. folders 252, 258, 274
- Billikopf, Jacob folders 41, 42, 104
- Bils, Olaf folder 204
- Biochemical Research Foundation folders 303, 304
- Birkhoff, Garrett folders 49, 51, 81, 273, 274, 278
- Birkhoff, George D. folders 36, 43, 44, 56, 66
- Biser, Irwin folder 54
- Bishop, Amasa folder 69
- Bishop, G.H. folders 68, 107, 108, 110
- Bissonnette, T.H. folder 61
- Black Mountain College folders 198, 200, 202, 205
- Blanc, Charles folder 55
- Blanchard, Arthur F. folders 109, 147
- Blanc-Lapierre, A. folders 81, 172
- Blaschke, Vaclav folders 33, 34, 37, 337
- Blichfeldt, H.F. folder 43
- Block Associates, Inc. folder 326
- Boas, Franz folders 51, 61
- Boas, Ralph P. folders 57, 59, 72, 146
- Boba, Antonio folders 258, 159
- Bockus, Henry L. See: College of Physicians of Philadelphia.
- Boelter, L.M.K. folders 94, 96, 98, 99, 106, 108, 114, 130, 173
- Bohr, Harald folders 2, 26, 27, 28, 30, 32, 37, 42
- Bok, S.T. folder 296
- Bolling, Richard folder 193
- Bonin, Gerhardt von folder 72
- Boring, Edwin G. folders 48, 66, 67
- Born, Max folders 29, 30, 31, 96, 101, 218
- Borsellino, Antonio folders 295, 296, 303
- Bose, Amar G. folders 214, 215, 227
- Boston Chamber of Commerce folder 19
- Boston College folders 273, 275
- Boston Colloquium for the Philosophy of Science. See: Robert S. Cohen.
- Bottomley, A. H. folder 315
- Boulding, Kenneth E. folders 186, 188
- Bouligand, G. folders 20, 25, 26-28, 30, 32
- Bower, John L. folder 78
- Bower, Julia Wells folders 81, 82

- Bowles, Edward L. folders 70, 261
- Bowman, John R. folder 110
- Braatoy, Trygve folders 115, 154, 166
- Brainerd, Henry Bowen folder 271
- Braines, S. folder 282
- Bram, Leila D. folder 336
- Brand, Louis folder 56
- Brandeis University folders 172, 227, 228, 242, 266, 291, 293, 331, 333
- Brandon, Henry folder 261
- Branquet, L.S. folders 34, 35
- Bray, Hubert folder 80
- Brazier, Mary A.B. folders 85, 98, 104, 107, 164, 176, 181, 183, 193, 200, 213
- Breadbend, T.A.A. folder 36
- Breen, Walter folders 179, 181, 182, 183, 192, 206
- Breitenberger, E. folders 242, 247
- Brelot, Marcel folder 33
- Brenner, J.L. folder 47
- Bridenbaugh, Carl folder 178
- Briggs, L.B.R. folder 12
- Bristol Company folders 123, 223, 224, 227
- British Columbia Academy of Sciences folders 231, 233
- Brockett, Paul folders 58, 61
- Bromfield, Morton folders 267, 269, 273, 276, 279, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 304, 305, 311, 313, 316
- Bronowski, Jacob folders 139, 141, 142, 154, 155, 162, 173
- Bronowski, Lilli folder 36
- Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences folders 126, 127
- Brooks, Cleanth folder 87
- Brown, Gordon S. folders 170, 171, 286, 287, 334
- Bruce, Robert E. folders 222, 227
- Buddrius, George W. folder 322
- Buerger, Martin J. folders 260, 266, 269, 273, 277
- Buhler, Karl folders 90, 98
- Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society folders 43, 47, 53, 54, 59, 63, 80, 82, 85, 104, 114,
   115
- Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists folders 94, 138, 139, 161, 215, 249, 270
- Burchaard, John Ely folders 80-82, 85, 91, 92, 103, 114, 159, 160, 273, 280
- Burckhardt, J.J. folder 207
- Burkhardt, G. folder 299
- Burrus, Ray C. folder 63
- Bush, Vannevar folders 2, 33, 34, 35, 42, 43, 50, 56, 58, 59, 62, 66, 297
- Bush, Wendell T. folder 12
- Cabrie, Zulema J. Escobar folder 286
- Caianiello, E.R. folder 248, 259, 269, 280, 281,293,296, 297, 299, 301, 303, 304, 306, 307, 309, 321, 331

- Cairns, S.S. folder 72, 76
- Cairns, W.D. folder 25
- Calcutta Mathematical Society folder 242
- Caldwell, S.H. folders 58, 59, 61
- Cambridge Hebrew Congregation and Schechter Society folder 35
- Cambridge Magazine folder 21
- Cambridge University Press folders 114, 115, 120, 175, 190, 299, 300, 303, 304, 316, 318, 327, 331
- Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament folder 311
- Campaign for World Government folder 73, 75
- Campbell, Alan D. folder 39
- Campbell, Donald P. folders 165, 205, 215, 219
- Campione, Peter folders 204, 209, 210, 236, 252
- Cantelli, Francesco Paolo folder 54
- Capla, V. folder 263
- Caratheodory, C. folders 30, 54
- Carmichael, Leonard folders 52, 71, 74, 111
- Carmichael, R.D. folder 40
- Carnegie Institute of Washington folders 79, 80, 82
- Cartan, E. folder 32
- Cartwright, Mary L. folders 34, 37, 93, 323, 331, 332
- Carver, Walter B. folder 55
- Casa Editrice Valentino Bompiani and C. folder 121
- Casals, Pablo folder 244
- Centennial Review of Arts and Sciences folders 273, 276, 290
- Centre National De La Richerche Scientifique folders 104, 126, 128, 132, 156
- Cerrillo, M.V. folder 270
- Chafetz, Morris E. folders 150, 177, 222
- Chakrabarty, S.K. folder 182
- Challenge folders 259, 285, 304
- Chang, Amos folders 85, 86
- Chao, Yuen Ren folders 21, 53, 87, 95, 97, 98, 99, 174, 271
- Charles Scribner's and Sons folders 107, 152, 154
- Charushin, V. folder 31
- Chase, Stuart folders 136, 177, 178, 179, 183, 184
- Cheatham, Thomas P. Jr. folders 93, 102
- Chern, S.S. folder 253
- Chesni, Y. folder 283
- Chevalier, Henri folder 130, 193
- Chiaromonte, Nicola folder 288
- China Aid Council folders 51, 52
- China Institute in America folders 43, 52, 61
- China Today folder 52
- Chipman, Miner folder 12
- Choi, Hae-Chung folder 266
- Choynowski, Mieczslaw folder 229

- Christian Colleges in China folder 45
- Chung, Kai Lai folders 77, 298
- Church Committee for China Relief folders 56, 57
- Cioraneseu, N. folder 31
- Circolo Matematico di Palermo folders 238, 239, 240
- City College folders 156, 158, 164, 166, 167, 175
- Clark, Alston folder 32
- Clark, Lyman Kenneth folders 34, 35, 44, 47
- Cleveland Athletic Club Journal folder 160
- Cleveland Clinic folders 119, 183
- Clymer, Ben folder 90
- Clynes, Manfred folder 305
- Cobb, Stanley folders 86, 115, 160, 170, 322
- Cohen, Irving L. folder 49
- Cohen, Robert S. folders 101, 296
- Colby College folders 203, 206
- Cole, Stewart G. folders 198, 201
- Coleman, James A. folders 203, 204
- College de France folders 106, 117, 119
- College Entrance Examination Board folders 39- 42, 45
- College of Physicians of Philadelphia folders 147, 151-153, 155, 157, 160
- Colloques Philosophiques de Royaumont folders 288, 289, 291, 292, 299, 305, 308, 322-324, 334
- Columbia Broadcast System, Inc. folders 179, 193, 202, 209, 247, 285, 286
- Columbia University folders 161, 229, 233
- Comision Permanente Del Primer Congresso Nacional De Matematicas folder 63
- Comitato Nazionale Per Le Recherche Nucleari. See: E.R. Caianiello.
- Committee to Secure Justice for Morton Sobell folders 255, 257-260, 262-264
- Compton, Arthur H. folder 31
- Compton, Karl T. folders 32-36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 46, 58-61, 69, 70
- Computing Reviews folder 285
- Conant, J.B. folder 46
- Conference Board of Associated Research Councils folders 102, 106-108, 120, 121, 128, 159, 189, 197, 198, 226, 273
- Conference on Methods in Philosophy and the Sciences folders 90, 91, 93, 114, 235
- Congress of Electronics and Television, Milan, Italy folders 183, 184
- Congress of Industrial Organizations folders 66, 209
- Conklin, Groff folders 173-178, 181, 183, 284, 286, 289, 337, 338
- Contemporary Issues folder 192
- Continental Congress for World Peace folder 101
- Control Engineering folders 116, 266
- Cooper Union folders 108, 213
- Cope, T. Freeman folder 62
- Corbiere, Henri folder 109
- Cornell University folder 309
- Courant, Richard folders 26, 27, 28, 39, 61

- Cowles Commission for Research in Economics folders 44, 45
- Coyle, Frank S. folders 81, 82
- Craig, Wallace folder 17
- Cramer, Harald folder 266
- Creative Frontiers folder 115
- Csaszar, A. folder 271
- Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace folder 93
- Cunniff, J.F. folders 178, 179
- Curry, Haskell B. folders 63, 67, 68
- Curtis Brown, Ltd. folders 127, 128
- Cybernetique folder 245
- · Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences folder 284
- Daly, F.S.T.L. folder 50
- Danforth, John folder 59
- Daniell, P. J. folders 2, 23, 30
- Danish Society of Natural Sciences folders 336, 337
- Dantzig, David van folders 31, 233
- Day, James R. folder 33
- de Becerra, Arturo Hernandez folder 3
- de Bruyne, Norman A. folder 37
- de Feriet, James. Kampe folders 51, 54, 70
- de Florez, Luis folder 31
- de la Torre, Lillian folder 184
- Della Riccia, Jaques folder 323
- Deming, W. Edward folders 67, 68
- Demos, R. folder 16
- De Santillana, Giorgio Dias folders 71, 81, 83, 84, 133, 135, 156, 275
- Desfage, J. folder 39
- Desmond, Thomas C. folders 111, 266, 267, 276
- Deutsch, Felix folder 58
- Deutsch, Karl W. folders 133, 169, 217, 297, 307, 319
- Devereux, George folders 165, 168, 170
- Devore, Lloyd T. folders 96, 99
- Dickotuny, S. folder 40
- Dickson, John B. folder 49
- Dickson, L.E. folder 13
- Dies, Josa Ma Samso folders 186, 285, 307
- Dietz, Albert folder 53
- Dietz, David folders 109, 123, 161, 214, 261, 262
- Dillon, J.C. folders 255, 256
- Diogene folders 273, 278
- Diogenes Club folders 106, 108, 131, 137, 163, 167
- Dockx, S. folder 323
- Dodge, Carroll folder 40
- Doetsch, G. folder 28

- Doob, Joseph L. folders 84, 85, 87, 95, 96, 97, 105, 108, 136, 159
- Doubleday and Company, Inc. folders 169, 172-176, 178-184, 188, 190-192, 194, 196, 198-207, 209-211, 213, 215, 216, 224, 226, 227, 231-235, 247, 252, 255, 283, 311, 338
- Douglas, Newhall folders 138, 143, 156
- Dover Publications, Inc. folders 126 138, 179, 181, 339
- Dreier, Theodore folder 233
- Dresden, Arnold folders 39, 40, 63, 70, 73
- Drew University folders 217, 219, 221, 223, 224, 227
- Dreyfus, M. folders 181, 183
- Dube, Georges folders 156, 169, 188
- Duke Mathematical Journal folder 51
- Dumm, Benjamin Alfred folders 131, 167
- Dun's Review folder 146
- Dunn, Halbert L. folders 186, 192
- Eastern Association of Electroencephalography folders 328, 329, 330, 332, 333, 334
- Eastern Colleges Science Conference folders 112, 114, 115, 116, 117
- Econ-Verlag folders 272, 276, 287, 288, 291, 294, 296, 299, 300, 306, 313, 315, 316, 323, 324, 325, 326, 331, 334, 335, 338
- Editions des Deux-Rives folder 162
- Ehrenreich, Joseph W. folders 160, 162
- Einstein, Albert folders 62, 81, 83, 84
- Electrical Manufacturing folders 266, 267, 269, 270, 271, 279, 281
- Electronics folders 80, 82, 83, 87, 108, 163, 164, 167, 185, 335
- Electronics Illustrated folder 285
- Eliot, Thomas D. folders 189, 193
- Eliot, Thomas Sterns folders 9, 10, 11
- Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine folders 90, 94
- Ellis, Weldon T. folders 196, 271, 272
- Elton, William folders 98, 121
- Encyclopaedia Britannica folders 199, 201, 256, 267, 268
- Encyclopedia Americana folders 100, 101, 103, 110, 137, 152, 180, 183, 185, 193, 200, 217, 218,
   226
- Epstein, Benjamin folder 52
- Epstein, Jason. See also: Doubleday and Company folders 252, 253
- Epstein, Paul S. folder 29
- Erdos, Paul folders 52, 54, 76
- Ernst Battenberg Verlag folders 311, 313
- Etan Yugoslav Committee for Electronics and Automation See: Radanovic, L.
- Etc.: A Review of General Semantics folders 121, 226, 227
- Evans, Griffith C. folders 47, 51, 52, 54, 99
- Evans, James C. folders 58, 97
- Everitt, W.L. folders 87, 89, 93, 98
- Extrapolative Company (Extra, Inc.) See: Newhall, Douglas.
- Eyges, Leon R. folder 54
- Eyre and Spottiswoode folders 137, 139, 142, 143, 166, 281

- Eyring, Henry folder 54
- Fairchild Research and Development Laboratory folder 306
- Fano, Giorgio folders 243,325
- Fant, Gunnar folders 294, 295, 311, 312, 315
- Fantasy and Science Fiction folders 177, 180, 181
- Farnsworth, Dana L. folders 148, 169
- Farrar, Straus and Company, Inc. folders 81, 82
- Fassett, Fred G. Jr. See also: Tech Press, and folders 55, 61, 169
- Fawley Foundation Lecture folder 208
- Feddrov, A. folder 284
- Federal Republic of Germany folder 248
- Feinler, Franz folder 39
- Fejer, L. folder 38
- Fekete, M. folder 47
- Feller, William folders 55, 60, 62, 86, 161, 235
- Fellowship of Reconciliation folders 73, 74, 75, 83, 126, 190, 193, 297
- Fenn, Wallace O. folder 234
- Fennel, Erik folder 87
- Ferdinand Enke Verlag folders 278, 279
- Fernandez-Moran, Humberto folder 49
- Feynman, Richard P. folder 293
- Filipovic, Rudolf folder 201
- First Church of Christ, Scientists folders 128, 129
- Fischer, Edward folder 46
- Fischer, Max folders 123, 127
- Fleming, J.A. folder 59
- Fletcher, W.M. folder 5
- Flexner, Abraham folder 33
- Foges, George folders 125, 132, 163
- Ford, Lester R. folders 56, 59, 62
- Ford Foundation folder 191
- Foreign Operations Administration folders 201, 206
- Formulast Corporation. See also: Bromfield, Morton folder 309
- Fort, Tomlinson folders 50, 60
- Fortune folders 179, 180, 181
- Foster, A.A. folders 117, 139
- Foundation for the Study of Cycles folders 111, 113
- Fowler, R.H. folder 54
- Fraenkel, A. folder 35
- Frank, Helmar G. folders 326, 327
- Frank, Lawrence K. folders 142, 143, 179, 181, 230
- Frank, Philipp folders 37, 62
- Frank, Waldo folders 129, 167
- Franklin, Philip folder 22
- Franklin Institute folders 77, 83, 111, 115, 116, 130

- Frechet, Maurice folders 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 30, 31, 63, 270, 279, 302
- Freeman, Harold folders 130, 150, 159, 172
- Freeman, Michael W. folders 246, 147
- Frege, G. folder 7
- Fremont-Smith, Frank folder 304
- Freund, Rose, nee Boochever folders 170, 174
- Friends of China, Inc. folders 42, 43
- Fromm, Erich folder 233
- Fujiwara, M. folder 43
- Fulbright Award folders 114, 115, 119
- Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopoedia folders 219, 221, 223, 234, 235, 244, 274, 292
- Gabor, Dennis folders 224, 227, 293, 299
- Galati, Theodore Fischer folders 168, 172, 175
- Galaxy Science Fiction See: Conklin, Groff.
- Galdston, Iago folders 126, 160-164, 171, 175, 178-183, 195, 204, 210, 224, 233, 252, 253, 275, 279, 291. See also: New York Academy for Medicine.
- Gallaudet College folders 108, 110, 111
- Gammons, Herman T. folders 35, 44, 45, 46, 47
- Gamo, Hideya folders 263, 267
- Gandara, Alfonso Napoles folders 63, 68, 70, 84, 107, 140
- Garabedian, Carl A. folders 19, 42
- Gardner, Martin folder 330
- Gardner, Sybil Paley folders 37, 38, 40
- Garrido, Luis folders 140, 157, 160
- Gelbart, Abe folders 60, 72
- General Electric folders 86, 97, 99, 152, 155
- General Moptors Corporation folder 245
- George, Frank H. folder 321
- George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. folders 143, 144, 228
- Gergen, J.J. folders 47, 49, 52, 53, 55, 56
- Gernsback, Hugo folders 95, 96, 102
- Gewertz, Charles M:son folders 40, 43, 49
- Ghosh, D.K. folders 191, 192
- Giedion, S. folders 111, 114
- Gilbreth, Lillian M. folder 170
- Gilchrist, Olga H. folder 86
- Gillespie, David C. folder 41
- Gillis, Joseph folders 37, 46
- Giorgi, I. Giovanni folder 36
- Glees, Paul folder 319
- Goddy, William folder 110
- Goetz, Leopold folder 197
- Gomes, Alair de Oliveira folders 183, 188, 189
- Gonseth, F. folder 36
- Gonzalez del Valle, Angel folders 137, 138

- Gonzalez-Fernandez, Jose M. folder 161
- Good, I. Jack folders 286, 287, 295
- Goodall, M.C. folders 109, 113, 121
- Goodman, C. See: Diogenes Club.
- Goodyear Aircraft Corporation folders 117, 134, 135
- Goranson, Roy W. folder 56
- Gordon, Edward E. folders 126, 127
- Gordon Research Conference on Instrumentation folders 186, 188
- Gouttes, Le Baron Jean de folder 141
- Gower, Ronald folder 36
- Grafflin, Allen L. folders 46, 86
- Graphic Arts Research Foundation folders 157, 221
- Gras, Edwin C. folder 62
- Graustein, William C. folders 40, 47, 53, 54
- Graves, L.M. folders 57, 59, 64
- Gray, William folders 333, 336
- Greene, Peter H. folder 281
- Grenander, Ulf folders 234, 237, 248, 250
- Grey Advertising Agency, Inc. folder 193
- Grinnell College folders 230-234, 236
- Grisoff, Stephen F. folders 303, 305
- Guldberg, Alf folder 42
- Gupta, Sen folders 5, 6
- Gurland, John folders 313, 321, 323, 325, 328-331, 334. See also: University of Wisconsin Mathematics Research Center.
- Guth, Eugene folders 55, 57, 62
- Guttinger, Werner folder 256
- Hadamard, Jacques folders 29, 32, 41, 43, 161, 163
- Hageman, Lloyd folder 131
- Hajek, Milos folder 79
- Halasz, S.T. folder 295
- Haldane, J.B.S. folders 38, 39, 41-43, 45-47, 60, 72, 73, 79, 86, 89, 98, 103, 121, 133, 150, 174, 203, 204, 291, 310
- Halmos, Paul R. folders 66, 68
- Halperin, Israel folder 83
- Halyserin, I. folder 44
- Handlin, Oscar folder 166
- Handworterbuch Der Sozialwissenschaften folders 315, 316, 318
- Handy Associates, Inc. folders 291, 292
- Hannum, Richard W. folder 54
- Hansen, G. folder 286
- Hardy, G.H. folders 12, 19, 22, 24, 28, 30, 33, 35, 37, 38, 40, 47
- Hardy, Gelston folders 243, 248, 254
- Harms, Meint folders 131, 166, 219, 223, 234
- Harper and Brotherss folders 94, 136, 144, 165- 167, 178, 201, 203

- Harreveld, Anthonie van folders 98, 100
- Harrison, George R. folders 67, 68, 71, 70, 81, 107, 121, 132, 279, 301
- Hart, J.G. folder 6
- Hart, J.N. folders 13, 15
- Harvard University folders 51, 126, 127, 158, 159, 161, 164, 209, 210, 241, 242, 257, 262, 274
- Hassenstein Bernard folders 255, 291
- Hatori, T. folder 164
- Haucourt, Genevieve d' folder 169
- Hauser, Ernst A. folder 106
- Hawkins, J.N.A. folders 119, 156
- Hazen, Harold L. folder 49, 61, 71
- Heckmann, O. folders 265, 267, 269, 274
- Hedenius, Per J. folder 327
- Hedrick, E.R. folders 24, 25, 39, 43, 46
- Heider, Fritz folder 150
- Hein, Piet folders 128, 130, 131, 136, 178, 322, 232
- Heins, Albert E. folders 109, 110, 114, 122, 153, 160, 172
- Henderson, Archibald folders 46, 130
- Henry Schuman, Inc., Publishers folders 105, 107
- Henshel, Harry B. folders 287, 291
- Hermann, Armin folder 321
- Hermann, Edwin folders 87, 90
- Hermann and Cie. folders 79-84, 87, 117, 119, 120, 139, 198, 214, 216, 218, 219, 221, 252, 257, 273
- Hermes, Hans folder 325
- Herriot, John G. folder 58
- Hertel, G. folder 325
- Hevane, T. folder 42
- Heyel, Carl folders 126, 167, 231, 234. See also: Society for Advancement of Management
- Heymans, Paul folders 25, 26
- Higgins, Thomas J. folder 297
- Hilbert, D. folders 27, 30
- Hildebrandt, T.H. folders 31, 57, 59
- Hille, Einar folders 32-37, 39, 41, 42, 53, 60, 79
- Hilsenrath, Seymour folders 113, 114
- Hilton, Alice Mary folders 324, 331, 332, 335. See also: Electrical Manufacturing
- Himes, Norman folders 46, 56, 61
- Hiong, King Lai folders 42, 46
- Hirano, E. folder 43
- History of Science Society folders 192, 193, 201
- Hoagland, Hudson folders 74, 81, 82, 86, 91, 100, 114, 116, 145, 161, 207, 208, 213, 323
- Hobson, Rosa folder 38
- Hocking, William Ernest folder 15
- Hoerule, R.F. Alfred folder 13
- Hogan, John V.L. folders 196, 197

- Holder, F.J. folder 13
- Hollcroft, Temple R. folders 50, 59, 101, 103, 104, 107
- Holton, Gerald folders 127, 129, 300, 334
- Holubar, Josef folder 301
- Hopf, Eberhard folders 34, 35, 36, 47
- Hopf, Heinz folder 42
- Hori, J. folders 149, 152, 154
- Hosokawa, Tadasu folder 337
- Hotelling, Harold folders 59, 61
- Houghton Mifflin, Co. folders 91, 93, 94, 97, 102, 105-109, 111, 113, 115, 117, 119, 124, 136, 139,140, 142, 143, 157, 163, 165, 190, 196-198, 217, 219, 222-224, 228, 280, 288, 329
- Householder, Alston S. folders 76, 77
- Hsiao, Sidney C.T. folder 51
- Hua, L.K. folders 45, 66, 71, 72
- Hubbard, L. Ron folder 121
- Hughes Aircrafat Company folders 178, 259, 262, 263, 270
- Humanity Guild, Inc. folders 306, 311
- Hungarian Academy of Sciences folders 284, 291
- Hunneman, W.C. folder 19
- Hunter, W.S. folder 55
- Huntington, Edward V. folders 14, 28, 60
- I.B.M. folders 70, 128, 246, 263, 264, 311, 314
- I.F. Stone's Weekly folder 234
- Ichikawa, Kikuya folder 276
- Igel, Frederico Carlos folder 269
- Ikehara, Shikao folders 34, 40-44, 54, 69, 87, 89, 94, 101, 108, 115, 121, 123, 149, 161, 162, 164, 187, 196, 200, 208, 211, 213, 215-221, 223-227, 231, 234, 251, 253, 262, 280, 299, 303, 306, 313, 315, 318, 321, 338.
- Ilotum, Robert C. folder 37
- Imahori, Katsumi folders 129, 139, 143, 149
- Incarbone, Saldtore folders 266, 295
- Indian Government folders 156, 158-160, 178, 180, 182, 185, 211
- Indian Mathematical Society folders 108, 243
- Indian Science Congress Association folders 155, 174, 176, 178, 185
- Industrial College of the Armed Forces folders 162, 163, 165, 183, 184, 187, 189, 202, 203, 204, 209, 210, 327, 329, 330
- Industrial Liaison Office folder 204
- Infelt, Leopold folders 82, 83, 85
- Information Theory Symposium folder 217
- Ingham, A.E. folders 36, 42, 54, 55, 57, 217
- Ingraham, Mark H. folders 47, 56
- Ingram, Wyatt H. folders 25, 43, 53
- Institut De Science Economique Appliquee folders 217, 221
- Institute for Associated Research folder 110
- Institute for Automation and Telecommunication folder 320

- Institute for Cancer Research folder 234
- Institute for Scientific Information folder 310
- institute for Teachers of Mathematics folders 185, 189
- Institute for the Unity of Science folder 161
- Institute of Early American History and Culture folders 91, 99
- Institute of Electrical Engineers of Japan folders 222, 216
- Institute of International Education folders 20, 43, 85, 86, 90, 92, 94
- Institute of Mathematical Statistics folders 75, 203
- Institute of Patentees folder 133
- Institute of Radio Engineers folders 81, 83, 85, 89, 101, 106, 108, 122, 126, 179, 186, 187, 188, 189, 191, 216, 237, 255, 256, 263, 265, 268, 281, 283, 285, 296
- Instituto Matematico See: Segre, Beniamino
- Instituto Politechnio Nacional. See: Mendez, Eugenio
- Instrument Society of America Journal folders 193, 196, 209
- International Brain Research Organization folders 291, 293
- International Conference on Automatic Controls and Servo-mechanisms folders 113, 114
- International Conference on Scientific Information folders 222, 241
- International Congress of Mathematics folders 53, 54, 83, 84, 85, 87, 90, 99, 126
- International Design Conference folders 207, 285, 290, 291, 294, 295, 206
- International Humanist and Ethical Union folder 296
- International Mark Twain Society folder 126
- International Radio and Television Organization folder 274
- International Science and Technology folder 309
- International Seminar for Students of Philosophy folder 227
- International Signifisch Genootschap folder 167
- International Society of Cybernetic Medicine folders 306, 308, 310, 327, 328
- International Standard Electric Corporation folder 47
- International Telephone and Telegraph Laboratory, Inc. folder 35
- international Union of Electrical Radio and Machine Workers folder 175
- Irtem, Ali folders 289, 306
- Iversen, Olav Hilmas folder 289
- Izumi, Shin-ichi folder 42
- J.B. Lippincott Company folders 201, 204
- J.L. Hudson Company folder 226, 227
- Jackson, Dugald C. folder 74
- Jackson, Dunham folders 56, 57, 60, 61, 62
- Jackson, Gardner folder 32
- Jackson, Geraldine folder 148
- Jakobson, Roman folder 92
- Javits, Jacob folder 258
- Jelenko, Victor folder 164
- Jessen, Borge folder 38
- Jewett, Frank B. folders 55, 59, 60, 61
- Johns Hopkins University folders 168, 230, 231
- John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation folders 104, 270, 286 (see also H.A. Moe)

- Johnson, Howard W. folders 220, 222, 237, 245
- Johnson, Roger A. folders 45, 46
- Johnson and Johnson folders 116, 117
- John Wiley and Sons, Inc. folders 80, 84-86, 95, 97, 98, 102, 104, 105, 112, 120-123, 135-137, 143, 144, 148, 149, 162, 167, 172, 175-180, 182, 194, 196, 217, 218, 226, 233, 241, 242, 245, 247, 251, 255, 281, 284, 292, 298, 323, 329.
- Jones, D.S. folders 264, 265
- Jones, R. Clark folders 267, 272
- Jope, Ralph T. folder 36
- Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation folders 71, 104, 125, 166, 171
- Jourard, Sidney M. folder 262
- Journal of Applied Physics folders 144, 180, 183
- Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods folder 12
- Journal of the Acoustical Society of America folder 122
- Journal of the Optical Society of America folders 159, 162, 169, 217, 243, 244
- Juniata College folders 92, 99
- Kac, Mark folders 55, 63, 66, 69, 70, 72, 319
- Kahane, Henry and Renee folder 241
- Kahn, Rudolf folder 39
- Kakutani, Shizuo folders 51, 58, 59, 60, 86, 184
- Kalinske, A.A. folder 49
- Kallen, Horace M. folders 41, 87, 90, 91, 92, 97, 98, 101, 103
- Kallianpur, G. folders 218, 219, 223
- Kanner, Oscar folder 93
- Kappers, J. Ariens folder 325
- Karamata, Jovan folders 2, 32, 46
- Karapetoff, Vladimir folder 60
- Karpovich, Michael folder 59
- Kastenmeier, Robert W. folders 269, 273, 275, 276, 278
- Kaufman, M. Ralph folder 51
- Kawaguchi, A. folder 242
- Keenan, Joseph H. folder 336
- Keller, Helen folder 111
- Kellogg, Oliver D. folders 24, 26, 28, 30, 31
- Kelly, Brenton folder 117
- Kemble, Robert P. folders 101, 106
- Kemp, Robert folders 129, 131
- Kent, Norton Adams folder 28
- Kent, Rockwell folders 135, 137
- Kepes, Gyorgy folders 140, 141
- Keyes, Fredrick G. folders 304, 305
- Kiely, Robert F. folders 192, 193
- Killian, James Rhyne folders 33-35, 36, 56, 104, 117, 141, 144, 216
- Kimpara, Atsushi folders 233, 246, 247
- Kingsford, R.A.L. folder 45

- Kirby, William H. Jr. folder 331
- Kirkwood, John G. folder 47
- Kissinger, Henry A. folders 195, 197, 201
- Kitagawa, Tosio folders 131, 176, 226
- Klambauer, Gabriel folder 293
- Klapper, Paul folder 59
- Klein, M. folder 63
- Kline, J. Robert folders 21, 39, 40, 50, 61, 62, 63, 66, 67-69, 71-73, 76, 79, 81, 83-85, 89, 91, 92-94, 99, 101-103, 105, 127
- Klug, Ulrich folders 230, 235
- Knoll, Max folders 262, 264, 310, 314
- Knolle, Peter folder 260
- Koffler, Arthur folder 253
- Koga, Issac folder 237
- Koga, T. folder 185
- Kolman, Arnost folders 316, 322
- Koosis, Paul folder 228
- Korn, Arthur folder 49
- Korzybski, Alfred folders 25, 90, 99, 100, 106, 109
- Kosambi, D.D. folders 39, 72, 73, 80, 97, 248-251
- Kosciuszko Foundation folders 52, 56
- Kotelly, John Christopher folders 284, 285, 287, 289, 332
- Kraemer, A. folder 324
- Kraft, Gotthold folder 122
- Kraus, Arthur J. folder 151
- Krishnan, K.S. folder 78
- Krishnavao, Gode V. folder 192
- Ksiazka, I. Wiedza folders 262, 263, 264, 287, 299, 301
- Ku, Y.H. folders 42, 121
- Kuntz, Paul G. folder 327
- Kutschera, Viggo Victor folder 176
- Kutzner, Hugo R. Paul folders 122, 124, 134, 162
- Laconia Evening Citizen folders 123, 131, 176, 250
- Landauer, Carl folder 41
- Landis, Janet folders 201, 219, 221
- Lap, Hannah folder 36
- Laremba, S. folders 28, 36
- Lasker, Edward folder 122
- Latil, Pierre de folders 126, 127
- Latour, Robert folder 144
- La Vallee Poussin, Louis de folders 27, 30
- Lavocat, R. folder 310
- Leaderman, Herbert folder 223
- League for Industrial Democracy folders 131, 322, 323, 325
- Leavitt, Laura S. folders 151, 152, 167

- Lebiz, N. folder 30
- Lee, Bernard S. folders 115, 116, 117
- Lee, Robert J. folders 153, 154
- Lee, Yuk Wing folders 32-36, 40-45, 48, 60, 61, 175, 195, 198
- Lefschetz, S. folders 28, 35, 38, 39, 47, 49, 53, 56, 60, 68, 93
- Lehrman, Edgar H. folders 295, 296, 298
- Leimann, Eugene folder 38
- Le Journal Technique folder 288
- Lemaire, J. See: Association Internationale de Cybernetique
- Lemke, William folder 118
- Lenox, William G. folder 134
- Leonard, Bill folder 169
- Lerner, Max folder 172
- Letov, A.M. folders 255, 278, 292, 335, 336
- Lettvin, Jerome Y. folders 70, 78, 321
- Leverhulme Research Fellowships folder 42
- Levine, Samuel folders 54, 56
- Levinson, Norman folders 40-43, 46, 55, 60, 63, 175
- Levy, Paul folders 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 32, 35, 36
- Lewis, C.I. folder 14
- Liaigre, L. folder 99
- Liberty Mutual folders 308, 321, 328, 331
- Lichtenstein, Leon folders 25, 27-30, 32, 34, 35, 37
- *Life* folders 93, 95, 113, 135, 164, 165, 194, 217
- Linder, Robert folder 158
- Lionnais, F. Lee folders 197, 198
- Lippe, Aschwin folders 119, 121, 125
- Littauer, Sebastian B. folders 85-87, 92, 93, 96, 112, 113, 128, 147
- Little, Brown and Company folders 189, 193, 195, 268
- Littlewood, J.E. folders 35, 102
- Litzinger, Marie folders 56, 58, 107
- Lochak, G. folder 324
- Locke, William N. folders 119, 268, 272
- Lockheed Missiles and Space Company folder 325
- Loeve, Michel folders 97, 113
- Lomnitz, Cinna folders 158, 308
- London Mathematical Society folder 38
- Look folders 192, 205, 210, 298
- Lorch, E.R. folders 70, 129, 131, 142
- Lorch, Lee folders 117, 259, 260, 266, 269, 276
- Lord and Taylor's American Design Awards folders 96, 112, 114, 115, 146
- Los Angeles City College folders 262, 263
- Lotka, Alfred J. folders 57, 58, 86
- Louis, Joe folder 60
- Lovett, Robert Morse folder 131

- Lowan, Arnold N. folder 59
- Lowell, A. Lawrence folder 15
- Lowell Institute Cooperative Broadcasting Council folders 125, 140, 131, 150, 237
- Lowenstein, Karl folders 40, 41
- Lowner, Karl folder 40
- Luedicke, Eduard folders 238, 239, 240
- Luria, S.E. folder 193
- Lush, Brandon folders 260, 261, 284
- Lutcke and Wulff folders 34, 35
- Lyle, Floyd folders 37, 38
- Lynn Committee for China Relief folder 52
- Machol, Robert E. folder 302. See also: Purdue University
- MacInnes, Duncan A. folders 114, 166, 334
- MacKay, D.M. folder 314
- Macmillan Company folders 39, 65, 77, 90, 91, 207, 210, 223
- Madow, William G. folders 43, 236
- Magoun, Jr., Francis P. folder 40
- Mahalanobis, P.C. folders 80, 169, 175, 176, 188, 189, 194, 208, 209, 210, 214, 216
- Mahler, Kurt folders 29, 34, 51, 54
- Mainstream folders 243, 244
- Malkin, I. folder 38
- Mandelbrojt, M.S. folders 72, 75, 77, 79, 84, 94, 105, 107, 108, 131, 152, 191
- Mandelbrot, Benoit folders 215, 224
- Mangold, K.P. folders 266, 267, 279, 287, 291, 305
- Manildi, J.F. folders 95, 96
- Mann, Thomas folder 131
- Mannix, Loretta H. folder 339
- Marcus, Michael B. folders 257, 262, 270, 276, 289, 290, 299
- Margenau, Henry folder 307
- Maria, Alfred, J. folders 24, 29
- Marks, Robert W. folder 97
- Marsalis, John H. folder 118
- Marshall, Thomas Jr. folders 219, 234, 277
- Martasian, Paul G. folder 190
- Martin, William Ted. folders 48, 66, 68, 84, 105, 118, 123, 135, 153, 188, 198, 199, 227, 230, 279, 289, 292, 298, 305, 319, 321, 325
- Maruyama, Magoroh folders 206, 207, 209, 210, 211, 251
- Marvin, Edgar folders 147, 150
- Masani, Pesi folders 188, 192, 193, 217, 218, 220, 222, 223, 226, 229, 230, 232, 234, 244, 248, 249, 250, 251, 254, 255, 263, 266, 269, 275, 282, 286, 294, 296, 297 298, 306
- Masaryk, Thomas E. folder 34
- Massachusetts Committee to Boycott Japanese Goods folder 49
- Massachusetts General Hospital folders 117, 222
- Matanic, Gertrud nee Wiener folders 246, 297, 304
- Mathematical Association of America folders 330, 331, 332

- Mathematical Society of Japan folder 216
- Mathematics in Science and Engineering folders 315, 319
- Mathews, Jr. S.H. folders 115, 116
- Maulsby, Lillian F.A. folder 3
- Max, Louis William folders 70, 71
- Max Planck Institut Fuer Biologie folder 333
- Mayer, Hans F. folder 324
- Mayne, Robert folders 87, 90
- Mayo Clinic folder 126
- McAfee, Mildred folder 52
- McBride, Mary Margaret folders 124, 167
- McCormack, Peter See: Committee to Secure Justice for Morton Sobell
- McCulloch, Warren S. folders 70-73, 77, 81, 85, 87, 94, 96, 97, 101, 118, 128
- McGowan, Patrick G. folder 111
- McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. folders 53, 70, 92, 93, 100, 108, 190, 219, 257
- McLuhan, H. Marshall folders 135, 143
- McMillan, Brockway folders 55, 59, 60
- McShane, E.J. folders 69, 146, 253, 256, 300
- Mead, Margaret folders 170, 243
- Meaker, W. Lathrop folders 88, 90, 91, 134
- Means, J. Howard folders 169, 177, 181
- Mecklin, J.M. folder 15
- *Medical Physics* folders 243, 249, 251, 252
- Meharry Medical College folders 120, 125, 126, 131, 133, 155, 159
- Mei, Y.C. folders 41, 42, 44, 46
- Meister, R.K. folder 103
- Mendez, Eugenio folders 266, 267
- Menger, Karl folders 33, 35, 46, 227
- Menninger Foundation folders 163, 164, 172
- Metzer, K. folders 307, 315
- Metzger, Arnold folders 206, 209, 223
- Metzner, Wolfgang folders 138, 154, 162, 220, 245, 320, 335
- Meyer, Heinrich folders 104, 105, 259
- Michal, Aristotle D. folders 70, 73
- Michel, Gilbert folders 131, 132, 133
- Mid-Century Conference for Peace folder 117
- Ming, Nai-Te folder 70
- Minsky, Edward folders 49, 50, 52
- Mitchell, Joseph J. folder 49
- MIT Graduate House folders 110, 111
- MIT Hillel Society folder 325
- Mitir, Lothar folder 31
- Mitra, Samarendra Kumai folders 87, 219, 221
- MIT School of Industrial Management folder 289
- MIT Technology Christian Association folders 203, 206, 209

- MIT The Dramashop folders 112, 126
- Moe, Henry Allen folders 28, 32, 44-46, 48, 49, 55, 59, 60, 62-66, 68, 69, 71, 75, 79, 83, 84, 131, 166, 178, 182, 183, 200, 204, 218, 220, 233, 276, 296, 298, 320
- Molina, Edward C. folder 96
- Monnier, Marcel folders 97, 102, 314
- Montgomery, Deane folder 59
- Montroll, Elliott folders 54, 169. See also: United States Navy
- Moore, Ernest C. folder 41
- Mordell, L. folders 60, 104, 182,219, 255
- Moreland, Donald W. folder 39
- Morgenstern, Oskar folders 75, 87, 92, 132
- Morgulis, S. folders 253, 263
- Morison, Robert S. folders 73, 75, 76, 79, 118, 173, 333
- Morris, J.C. folders 61, 63
- Morse, Marston folders 56, 57, 58
- Morse, Philip M. folder 219
- Morton, Paul L. folders 97, 98
- Mosteller, Frederick folders 81, 91, 93, 94
- Mott, William S. folder 16
- Moulyn, Adrian C. folders 123, 138
- Mount Holyoke College folders 106, 189-192
- Muftic, Mahmoud K. folder 285
- Mullinix, R.C. folder 97
- Mullins, G.W. folder 39
- Mumford, Lewis folder 128
- Munding, Robert folder 16
- Munshower, C.W. folders 55, 77
- Munsterberg, Hugh folder 7
- Murnaghan, Francis D. folders 31, 49, 55, 57
- Murrow, Edward R. folders 42, 168
- Muscio, Bernard folders 5, 7, 13, 15, 18, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 32
- Muses, Charles A. folders 127, 128, 130, 139, 151, 311
- Muste, A.J. folder 233
- Myhill, J.R. folders 104, 106, 108
- Napalkov, A.V. folders 286, 311
- Nash, John folders 159, 269
- Nash, John F. Jr. folder 326
- National Academy of Sciences folders 39, 43, 61, 70, 263. 309, 329
- National Better Business Bureau, Inc. folders 154, 155
- National Broadcasting Company, Inc. folders 79, 111, 113, 204, 205, 215, 219, 235, 236, 253
- National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, Inc. folders 255, 289, 306, 307
- National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions, Inc. folders 113, 114, 115, 193
- National Defense Research Commission folders 63, 64, 68
- National Education Association folder 235
- National Institute of Health folders 123, 148, 222

- National Institute of Mental Health folder 214
- National Management Council folder 159
- National Research Corporation folder 306
- National Research Council folder 152
- National Research Council-Canada folders 104, 106, 108, 112, 114, 116, 202
- National Science Foundation folders 151, 152, 154, 174, 181, 188, 190, 191, 192, 196, 197, 205, 207, 208, 211, 213, 264, 268, 297, 298, 299, 300
- National Society for the Study of Communication folders 127, 148, 159, 160, 170, 172, 178, 181,
   182
- Naumov, B. folders 278, 281
- Neel, James V. folders 138, 139
- Neisser, Hans folder 41
- Neugebauer, O. folder 60
- Neutra, Richard J. folder 186
- New Departure folders 86, 87, 89, 92
- New England Institute for Medical Research folders 228, 229, 230
- New Jersey Division of State and Regional Planning folder 312
- Newsweek folders 166, 204, 205, 236, 255, 270, 283
- New York Academy for Medicine folders 111, 113, 117, 118, 123, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 154.
   See also: Iago Galdston
- New York Academy of Sciences folders 72, 84, 85, 147, 173, 237, 292, 294, 295, 297, 300, 302
- New York Mirror folders 125, 126, 128
- New York School of Social Work folder 48
- New York Society for General Semantics, Inc. folders 178, 180
- New York Times folders 93, 94, 99-101, 103, 104, 130, 131, 133, 142, 193, 202, 209, 227, 228
- New York University folders 229, 231, 243, 245- 247, 257, 258, 261, 262
- Neyman, Jerzy folders 55, 56, 79, 99, 106, 111, 113, 179, 192, 193, 198, 203, 205, 207, 209, 219
- Ng, Keng-Yong folder 300
- Nicolau, Edmond folder 219
- Nielson, John P. folder 131
- Nievergelt, Jurg folders 299, 301, 304
- Nihoul, Jacques C.J. folder 312
- Nobel, Werner folders 195, 198, 199
- Nordheim, L.W. folder 45
- Norlund, N.E. folders 30, 31, 32
- Northrop, F.S.C. folders 70, 73, 75
- Norwegian Academy of Technical Sciences folder 336
- Noyes, George R. folder 3
- Noyes, Waldo folders 169, 297
- Oakley, C.O. folder 39
- Oldenbourg, R. folder 322
- Oldenburger, Rufus folders 46, 47, 53, 169
- Olds, Edwin G. folder 60
- Olsen, G.A. folder 32
- Ono, Katuzi folders 224, 233

- Onsager, Lars folder 70
- Opatowski, I. folder 62
- Open Court Publishing Company folders 13, 14
- Operations Research Society of America folder 178
- Oppenheimer, Jane folders 127, 129
- Optical Society of America folders 150, 152, 153, 154, 157, 177
- Otto, Wolfgang folder 170
- Oue, K. folder 3
- Oxford University Press folder 202
- P.F. Collier and Son Corporation folders 212, 213, 226, 227
- Paley, R.E.A.C. folder 37
- Palyi, Melchior folder 41
- *Parade* folders 169, 170
- Parschkis, Victor folders 81, 83, 84, 95, 102, 112
- Parsegian, V.L. folders 306, 307, 308, 311, 315, 318, 322, 324, 326, 331, 335
- Parske, Richard A. folders 101, 103
- Pasternak, Max folders 116-120, 123, 124, 125
- Pathfinder folders 117, 127
- Pati, T. folder 285
- Patterson, A.L. folders 141, 179, 184, 263, 265, 270
- Patton, William E. folder 48
- Paul, Felix folder 319
- Pauling, Linus folders 126, 228, 290, 331
- Peach, Bernard folders 284, 285
- Pearl, Raymond folder 56
- Pease, Craig folders 289, 293, 297
- Pell, Anna Johnson folder 22
- Pennsylvania State University folders 115, 117, 207
- Peres, J. folder 52
- Pergamon Press folders 262, 264, 265, 266, 267, 270, 272
- Perkinds, William Harvey folders 90, 91
- Pernecky, Paul folder 121
- Perry, Ralph B. folder 15
- Perspectives in Biology and Medicine folders 226, 254, 255, 259, 261
- Pfeiffer folders 20, 23
- Pfeiffer, John E. folders 72, 73, 83, 118, 146
- Pfluger, Albert folders 193, 197
- Phillips, H.B. folders 44, 61, 62, 65
- Philosophy of Science Association folders 38, 39, 84, 86, 91, 93, 95, 119, 170, 194, 195
- Philosophy of Science Journal folders 38, 39
- Phoutrides, Aristides Evangelos folder 12
- Physics Today folders 117, 121, 131
- Physik Verlag folder 317
- Pick, Gerard folders 239, 295, 303

- Pickler, Andrew G. folders 118, 130, 148, 149, 150, 151, 159, 161, 196-199, 201, 202, 206, 208, 210, 213, 293, 295-298
- Pincus, Gregory folder 73
- Pious, W.L. folders 257, 158
- Pitkin, Walter B. folders 224, 225
- Pitt, H.R. folders 52, 54, 55
- Pitts, Walter folders 77, 78, 104
- Plancher, Robert folder 242
- Plancherel, Michel folders 26, 210
- Plass, Martha Hathaway folder 52
- Pocket Books, Inc. folders 194, 196, 197, 202, 207
- Pohl, Frederik folders 308, 309
- Polowsky, Joseph folders 258, 259, 260, 271, 276, 311
- Polya, G. folders 37, 59, 60, 79, 93
- Portela, Antonio Gouveia folders 219, 220, 222, 224, 228, 235
- Povarov, G.N. folder 274
- Powers, William T. folder 209
- Prager, W. folders 71, 72, 73, 104, 105, 109
- Prasad, A.V. folders 169, 180, 182, 183
- Prasad, B.N. folder 202
- Prescott, S.C. folder 41
- Proceedings of the American Mathematics Society folders 137, 138, 142
- Purdue University folders 269, 274, 275, 281, 286-288, 290, 291, 295, 299, 300, 305
- Quastler, Henry folders 164, 189
- Radanovic, Ljubomir folders 315, 316, 318, 320, 336
- Rademacher, Hans folders 41, 42, 70, 72, 194, 196
- Radio Corporation of America folder 144
- Radiodiffusion et Television Française folders 137, 139
- Radio Free Europe folder 289
- Rainich, G.Y. folder 30
- Raisbeck, Gordon folders 107, 112, 122, 123, 126, 224, 273
- Rajalakshman, D.V. folder 222
- Ramanujan, V. folder 230
- Ramaswamy, M.A. folders 156, 162
- Ramo-Woolridge Corporation folder 217
- Rand Corporation folder 155
- Rand McNally and Company folder 299
- Random House folders 96, 98, 254-259, 262-266, 268, 269, 273-275, 277, 279, 283, 285, 293-296, 304, 305, 323, 324, 329, 331, 338
- Rankin, Bayard (Sam) folders 215, 216, 240, 256, 260
- Ransom, William R. folders 140, 142, 314
- Rao, C.R. folder 321
- Rao, N.N. Narayan. See: Association of Scientific Workers of India
- Rapport, David folder 73
- Rashevsky, N. folders 86, 89, 92, 93, 104, 116, 192

- Raskin, Eugene folder 73
- Rassegna Internazionale Elettronica Nucleare E Teleradio Cinematografica folders 312-314, 318,
   319
- Rathe, Alex W. folders 125-127, 147, 159-163, 167, 172, 178, 179, 205. See also: Society for Advancement of Management
- Raytheon Manufacturing Company folders 153, 277
- Recueil Mathematique folder 59
- Redmann, Robert E. See: Industrial Designers Institute
- Regber, J. Marshall folders 315, 323, 336, 337
- Reinke, Wolfgang folder 134
- Reinwald, Karl folder 311
- Remington Rand folders 130, 219, 256, 303
- Ren, Yuen folder 170
- Reuther, Walter P. folders 103, 106, 108, 115, 121, 146
- Rhine, J.B. folders 85, 259
- Rias Funkuniversitat folders 217, 230, 236, 237, 239, 240, 262, 326
- Richardson, R.G.D. folders 22, 30, 38, 39, 41-44, 49, 56-58, 60-62, 67, 68, 70-73, 79-81
- Richmond, Donald E. folders 115, 116
- Richmond Area University Center, Inc. folders 97, 99
- Ridenour, Louis, N. folder 123
- Ridial, Mick folder 54
- Riesman, David folders 241-243, 247, 252, 255
- Riesz, Fredrick folders 28, 54
- Rifeutal, S.W. folder 37
- Rinehart and Company, Inc. folders 155, 156, 205
- Rines, George E. folder 32
- Rioch, Janet Mackenzie folders 106, 131, 166, 181, 201
- Ripley's Believe it or Not! folder 140
- Ritner, Peter V. folders 70, 77
- Ritt, J.F. folders 41, 62
- Roback, A.A. folder 55
- Roberts, Frank folders 110, 124
- Robertson, Archibald F. folders 148, 150
- Robinette, W.C. folders 174, 175
- Robinson, Charles E. folders 285, 289, 297, 310, 318, 319, 321, 324, 331
- Robinson, Enders A. folders 200, 211
- Robinson, G. de B. folder 60
- Robinson, Preston folder 53
- Roche Research Club. See: Scientific Research Society of America
- Rockefeller, Nelson A. folder 277
- Rockefeller Foundation folders 71, 73, 76, 152, 207, 209-211
- Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research. See: Shedlovsky, Ted
- Rocketdyne folder 261
- Romanoff, N. folder 40
- Rosenbach, J.B. folders 85, 86, 109

- Rosenblatt, Alfred D. folders 35, 38, 54, 62, 267
- Rosenblith, Walter A. folders 202, 216, 220, 303, 333
- Rosenblueth, Arturo folders 66, 68, 69, 71, 75, 77, 80, 83, 87, 89, 94, 95, 98, 112, 116, 118, 119, 121, 124, 129, 147, 153, 155, 167, 182, 295, 313, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329
- Rosenblueth, Emilio folders 97, 160, 170
- Rosenfield, Harry N. folders 273, 276, 277
- Ross, Arnold E., folders 66, 77
- Rossi, Paul folders 272, 274, 280, 337
- Rosso, Paul G. folder 309
- Rothe folders 39, 40
- Rothstein, Jerome folders 134, 136, 144, 145- 149, 151-153, 156, 193, 196, 226, 230
- Roudebush, Allen T. folder 153
- Rowe, Allan Winter folder 39
- Royal Society of Arts folders 275, 279, 283, 310
- Royce, Josiah folders 8, 13
- Ruckmick, Christian A. folders 43, 56
- Rudenberg, Reinhold folders 31, 35
- Rudolf Virchow Medical Society of New York City folders 225, 226, 229, 230, 234-236, 239, 241, 245, 250, 254, 255
- Rukeyser, Muriel folders 95, 97, 108
- Rule, John T. folder 275
- Russell, Bertrand folders 5, 8, 12, 21, 36
- Russell, Dick S. folder 325
- Rutgers University folders 158, 159, 164, 165, 166
- Rutter, Peter folders 168, 285
- Sachar, A.L. folders 161, 162
- Sage, N. McL. folders 58, 61
- Sakai, Masatasi folder 50
- Salem, Raphael folders 60, 142, 149
- Saleski, R.E. folder 4
- Saltonstall, Leverett folder 211
- Salzburg Seminar in American Studies folder 314
- Sargent, Porter folders 89, 123, 125, 128, 250
- Saslaw, Sam and Dora folders 50, 51, 62
- Saturday Evening Post folders 234, 236, 240
- Saturday Review folders 107, 139, 142, 202, 204, 205, 274, 277, 285, 286, 295, 299, 332
- Savage, L. James folders 209, 210, 213, 295
- Schade, Johannes P. folders 315, 316, 319 325, 326, 327, 330, 332, 333, 335, 339
- Scherbak, H. folder 99
- Schering folders 227, 228, 229, 239
- Schlecht, William S. folders 119, 121
- Schmeidler, W. folder 39
- Schmidt, Robert folders 2, 28, 34
- Schmitt, Francis folders 73, 260, 281
- Schneider, Nettie folder 49

- Schoenberg, I.J. folders 38, 39, 326
- Schouten, Jan F. folders 35, 113, 131, 150, 152, 172, 272, 309, 311
- Schulman, Edmund folders 51, 52
- Schutzenberger, D. folders 134, 137, 142, 143, 144
- Schwartz, Laurent folders 125, 194
- Schwarz, Edward R. folder 55
- Science folders 229, 266, 271, 272, 274, 281, 282
- Science Illustrated folders 93, 97
- Scientia folders 142, 146, 147, 151, 182, 188, 192, 228, 241, 242, 257, 266, 268, 290, 302
- Scientific American folders 82, 83, 91, 93, 101, 103, 153, 156, 157, 158, 247
- Scientific Research Society of America folders 97, 100, 194, 201, 210, 211, 213
- Scimone, Frank J. folder 49, 50, 55, 60, 61
- Scripta Mathematica folders 81, 83, 89, 90, 104, 106, 111, 115, 125
- Scuola de Perfezionamento in Fisica Teorica E. Nucleare. See: E.R. Caianello
- Scuola Di Studi Superiori Sugli Idrocarburi folders 309, 310, 315, 324, 327
- Scurlock, J.C. folders 183, 188
- Seeger, Raymond J. folder 67
- Seely, Caroline folders 41, 54
- Segal, Irving E. folders 57, 83, 117, 266, 268
- Segre, Beniamino folder 311
- Selfridge, Gordon folders 78, 259
- Sen, B.M. folder 268
- Sentic, Ante V. folder 315
- Sevier, John R. folder 295
- Shakhashiri, Z.A. folder 273
- Shannon, Claude folders 85, 91, 173
- Shayman, L. folder 319
- Shedlovsky, Ted folders 93, 127, 167, 189, 210, 255, 319
- Shii, S.S. folder 45
- Shohat, J.A. folders 31, 37, 39, 40
- Sholl, Donald A. folders 150, 152
- Shu, Seynan S. folders 66, 69, 80
- Siegel, Armand folders 154, 175, 194, 198, 214, 215, 217, 220, 241, 247, 311, 335
- Siegel, C.L. folder 34
- Siemens and Halske folders 35, 36
- Sierpinski, W. folders 23, 24
- Signal Corps Engineering Laboratory folders 124, 141
- Silverman, Louis L. folders 41, 152, 157
- Simmons College folders 105, 207
- Simon, Webster G. folder 160
- Simon and Schuster, Inc. folders 145, 147-154, 158-160, 162, 163, 165, 166-168, 170-172, 175-180, 182, 187, 191, 202, 215, 221, 223, 243, 256, 298-300, 316, 326, 334, 335
- Sinclair, Angus folders 149, 150
- Skillin, G.R. folder 42
- Slotnick, Morris M. folder 40

- Smith, A.W. folders 46, 47
- Smith, Cedric A.B. folder 314
- Smith, Frank Leon folders 306, 307, 308
- Smith, Otto J.M. folders 159, 168
- Smith, P.F. folder 20
- Smullin, Louis D. folder 168
- Smullyan, Arthur F. folder 62
- Snyder, Carl folder 41
- Soble, Abraham B. folders 90, 114, 150, 241, 331, 332, 333
- Social Science Research Council folder 145
- Societe Internationale de Medicine Cybernetique folders 261, 263, 266, 269, 270, 272, 274, 282, 285, 288
- Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics folders 155, 173
- Society for Social Responsibility in Science See: Victor Paschkis
- Society for the Advancement of Management folders 122, 124-130, 138, 167, 236
- Soderberg, C. Richard folder 64
- Sokolov folders 278, 280
- Soni, R.C. folder 10
- Soviet Encyclopedia folder 314
- Spacek, Antonin folders 109, 115, 216, 218, 252
- Spanish Refugee Appeal folders 80-82
- Speckled Bank folders 245, 273, 311, 312
- Spencer, Roy C. folders 59, 164, 251
- Sperry, Henrietta folder 37
- Spier, Fred S. folder 112
- Sprague, Howard B. folder 100
- Springer-Verlag folders 278, 279, 284, 285, 289, 290, 293, 304, 305, 307, 311, 315, 318
- Sproul, Robert G. folder 41
- St. Louis Post-Dispatch folders 170, 171, 202, 203, 205
- Stacy, Ralph W. folder 248
- Stahlmam, William D. folders 86, 92, 94, 101, 104
- Stanley-Jones, D. folders 265, 267, 270, 273, 274, 285
- Stark, Lawrence folders 223, 324
- Starr, Raymond W. folder 43
- Statistical Research Group folder 65
- Stavid Engineering, Inc. folders 195, 198, 199, 200, 201
- Stephens, Harold M. folders 53, 60
- Sternberg, Wolfgang folder 62
- Stetson, Harlan T. folder 64
- Stevens, Raymond folder 45
- Stevenson, Adlai E. folder 190
- Stewart, Irvin folder 55
- Stibitz, George Robert folders 61, 135
- Still, Joseph W. folders 161, 175, 237
- Stone, Elliot H. folder 299

- Stone, Marshall H. folders 36, 37, 56, 57, 69, 70, 89, 90, 154
- Stormer, Carl folder 42
- Stout, G.F. folder 11
- Stout, Rex folders 183, 316, 318, 322
- Straneo, Paolo folders 25, 30
- Strassman, Toni folders 124, 125
- Stratton, Julius A. folders 120, 155
- Strick Film Company folders 129, 131
- Strong, John folder 279
- Struik, Dirk Jan folders 32, 40, 44, 45, 54, 142, 156, 337
- Stuart, I. Leighton folder 49
- Stuler, Alexander folder 141
- Su, Buchin folders 63, 64
- Sue, Pierre folder 136
- Suh, Tsung-Hwa folder 49
- Suhara, Kenkichi folder 217
- Sundaram, M.S. folders 168, 172, 176, 206, 207
- Sutherland, W. Frank folders 87, 94, 97, 100, 131
- Swett, Warren L. folders 167, 170, 173
- Swiss Educational Tours for Administrative and Technical Automation and Operation Research to the U.S.A. folders 291, 293, 301
- Symposium in Applied Mathematics folder 291
- Symposium on Sensory Deprivation folders 239, 241, 151
- Synge, John L. folders 41, 65, 71, 174
- Szasz, Otto folders 23-25, 33
- Szego, Gabor folders 79, 209, 301
- Szeliski, Victor S. von folder 51
- Takasu, Tsurusaburo folder 216
- Talbot, H.P. folder 21
- Tallman, Gerald B. folders 117, 149, 159
- Tallman, Harold Lamont folders 257, 262, 288, 295, 328. See also: U.C.L.A.
- Tamarkin, J.D. folders 30, 31, 34, 35, 36-41, 50, 51, 56, 61
- Tanner, Wilson P. Jr. folder 304
- Tass folder 286
- Tata, Inc. folders 72, 73, 80, 184, 236, 301, 304, 305
- Tate, Vernon D. folders 123, 130, 133, 180, 207
- Taubmann, Harro folders 331, 332
- Tavani, F. folder 52
- Taylor, George S. folders 25, 35, 219
- Taylor, James H. folders 32, 61
- Taylor, John folder 47
- Taylor, W. Sidney folder 271
- Taylor Instrument Company folder 160
- Technion Yearbook folders 101, 185
- Technocracy folder 206

- Temberley, H.N.V. folder 312
- Terletsky, Yakov P. folders 332, 333, 335
- The American College Dictionary folders 111, 112, 165
- The American Mercury folders 90, 156, 158, 159, 160
- The Analysts Journal folder 153, 155
- The Asia Foundation folders 220, 221, 247
- The Commonwealth Fund folders 214, 215
- The Cybernetics Group folders 85, 117
- The Duodecimal Society of Great Britain folders 259, 280
- The Hayden Planetarium folder 176
- The Jewish Advocate folder 39, 42
- The Liberal Arts Press folders 121, 122, 130
- The MIT Press folders 79, 84, 85, 92, 103, 105, 107, 108, 135, 138, 142, 143, 144, 163, 180, 188, 189, 194, 198, 254, 258, 272, 274, 285-287, 289, 297, 298, 301, 302, 318, 320, 324, 330, 334, 335, 337, 338
- The Monist folder 307
- The Nation (Associates) folders 3, 113, 115-117, 119-121, 124, 125, 136, 160, 192, 222, 224, 242, 301
- The New Lincoln School's Conference on Education folder 209
- The New Republic folders 240, 241, 242, 243
- *Theosophy* folder 92
- The Socialist Call folders 163, 165, 178, 196
- The Technology Review folders 258, 259, 263, 286, 296, 299, 336
- The Telegram folders 126, 127
- The University Society folders 35, 37
- *Think* folders 262, 278, 279
- Third Berkeley Symposium on Mathematical Statistics and Probability. See: Neyman
- This I Believe folders 169, 171, 172, 179, 200, 203
- Thomas, Norman folders 174, 175
- Thomas-Stahle, C. folder 60
- *Tiempo* folder 113
- *Time* folders 90, 92, 110, 227
- Tintner, Gerhard folder 194
- Titchmarsh, E.C. folders 1, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46
- Today folder 170
- Tonelli, Levinola folder 39
- Transactions of American Mathematical Society folder 13
- Trinity Church folders 205, 227
- Trombley, Eugene F. folder 88
- Truscoot, David folder 39
- Tschyvekov, Pavel folders 251, 254
- Tsvetkov, B. folder 321
- Tuan, Hsio-Fu folder 59
- Tucci, Niccolis folder 99, 119, 120
- Tufts University folder 282, 284, 291-294

- Tukey, John W. folders 52, 73, 75
- Tunturi, Archie R. folder 178, 185, 187, 190, 191, 193, 198
- Turan, Paul folder 97
- Tyler, H.W. folders 28, 30, 42
- U.S. News and World Report folders 333, 336
- Uhlenbeck, George E. folder 30, 38, 67
- UNESCO folders 84, 86, 93, 94, 233
- *Union Review* folder 295
- United Research Corporation folders 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 43, 44
- United States Air Force folders 173, 190, 191, 193, 243, 245, 326, 333
- United States Army Medical Center folders 98, 99
- United States Coast Guard Academy folder 172
- United States Congress folder 188
- United States Department of State folders 98, 105, 121, 129, 131, 133, 138, 161, 222
- United States Lines folders 164, 165, 168, 169, 200
- United States Navy folders 58, 63, 70, 71, 73, 75, 99
- United States Office of Scientific Research and Development folders 63, 66, 71
- United States Securities and Exchange Commission folder 68
- United States Veterans Administration folders 102, 104, 107, 119, 123, 124, 131, 161-165, 170, 181
- United States Veterans Bureau folder 28
- United States Works Progress Administration folder 50, 60
- University of California at Los Angeles folder 261, 262, 266, 291, 319
- University of Chicago Press folders 198, 199
- University of Wisconsin-Mathematics Research Center folders 316, 325, 331, 332
- Upham, Charles folder 46
- *Urania* folders 337, 338
- Vail, David, J. folder 172
- Valens, J. folder 51
- Vallarta, Manuel Sandoval folders 26, 29, 70, 79, 139, 190
- Vallee, Robert folders 133, 137, 141, 159, 182, 185, 187, 190, 191, 192, 198, 199, 200
- Van Der Pol, Balth folders 142, 149, 155, 188
- Van Dine, S.S. folders 30, 31
- Varnum, Edward C. folder 278
- Veb Gustav Fischer Verlag folders 273, 284
- Veblen, Oswald folders 17, 18, 22, 28, 30, 32, 39, 46, 47
- Verbeek, Leo folder 300
- Vez, Ing. Leon A. Valos folders 69, 70
- Vignaud, Henry folder 21
- Vijayaraghavan, T. folders 46, 52, 80, 135
- Villat, Henri folder 21
- Virginia Quarterly Review folders 155, 190
- Viswanatham, B. folders 185, 188
- Vodovnik, Lojze folder 321
- Vogue folder 308
- Voice of America folder 161

- Von Bertalanffy, Ludwig folder 97
- Vonnegut, Bernard folder 299
- Vonnegut, Jr., Kurt folder 153
- Von Neumann, John folders 38, 47, 52, 53, 56, 60, 61, 66, 67, 68, 72, 90, 101, 104, 118, 125, 128, 166
- Von Schenck, Ernst folder 233
- Voprosy Filosofii (Problems in Philosophy) folders 265, 281, 288, 290, 292
- Voraz, Charles folders 221, 230, 243
- Voronov, A.A. folders 283, 284
- Vose, R.W. folder 39
- Vowels, R.E. folder 193
- W.W.H. Wise and Company, Inc. folder 63, 64, 215, 246, 247
- W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. folder 116, 119, 179, 180
- Wabash College folder 124, 126, 129, 150, 231- 234
- Wagner, R. folder 288
- Waite, Jr., John Herbert folder 236
- Wald, George folder 115
- Walker, Earl folder 184
- Wallace, Richard A. folders 135, 146
- Wallis, W. Allen folders 64, 65
- Wallman, Henry folders 84, 87, 89, 96
- Walmsley, C. folder 57
- Walsh, Joseph L. folders 24, 49, 70, 71, 72
- Walter, Grey folder 96, 97, 101, 103, 104, 108, 110, 113, 114, 142, 151, 165, 169, 210, 211, 217, 219, 233, 260
- Walther, A. folders 243, 244
- Walther, Gertrud folder 112, 139, 141
- Wangs, Lottie folders 85, 89
- Warfel, Harry R. folders 260, 262
- Warner Brothers folder 47
- Warren, Bertram E. folder 28
- War Resisters League folders 73, 202
- Warschawski, Stefan folder 41
- Watanabe, Michael Satashi folders 303, 321, 329, 332
- Watkins, Ann folder 48
- Watson-Watt, Robert folder 280
- Watzlawick, Paul folder 259
- Wayne State University folders 231, 233, 234, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 251
- Weaver, Warren folders 58, 59, 61, 62, 64, 66, 67, 76, 84, 87, 93, 109, 136, 150, 168
- Webster, Fred folders 778, 93
- Webster, Harold folder 259
- Weddderhom, J.K.M. folder 23
- Weeks, Dorothy W. folders 39, 66, 67
- Wehausen, John folder 69
- Wei, L.Y. folders 263, 266

- Weida, F.M. folder 39
- Weisskopf, Victor folder 229
- Weizmann Institute of Science folders 204, 207, 209, 211, 305, 306, 319, 331, 334
- Weld, W.E. folder 70
- Welles, Barbara folder 124
- Wellesley College folders 300, 301
- Western Reserve University folders 152-154, 159, 160, 169
- Weyl, Hermann folders 30, 31, 50, 57, 62, 63, 76
- WGBH-FM folders 229, 265, 267
- Whiteside, Thomas folders 178, 203, 224, 235, 236, 247, 248, 265
- Whitney, Hassler folder 69, 79, 80, 84
- Whyte, John folder 41
- Whyte, Peter folder 37
- Wichterman, Ralph folder 327
- Widder, Dave V. folders 56, 57, 109
- Wiener, Bertha, ne Kahn folders 6, 16, 20
- Wiener, Constance (Franklin) folders 6, 18, 21
- Wiener, Leo folders 3, 5, 6, 7, 8-11, 14, 21
- Wiener, Peggy folder 195
- Wiener, Philip P. folders 155, 158
- Wieser, Kurt folders 213, 215, 234
- Wiesner, Jerome B. folders 104, 105, 106, 108, 121, 144, 160, 307
- Wilcox, Herbert B. folder 132
- Wilder, Joseph folders 235, 239
- Wildes, Karl folders 47, 301
- Wilks, S.S. folders 63, 66
- William Morrow and Company, Inc. folder 104
- Williams, K.P. folder 59, 60
- Wilson, Edwin B. folders 21, 23, 27, 42
- Wilson, Gil folder 213, 261, 262, 266
- Wilson, Sloan folder 163, 164
- Windham Finite Machine Company folder 193
- Wintner, Aurel folder 42, 50, 54, 55, 56, 57, 61, 238, 243, 247
- Wirth, P. folder 217
- Wittmer, Felix folder 311
- Wolf, Frantisek folder 59, 71, 179
- Wolferez, Louis E. folder 48
- Wolferz, Katherine King folder 48
- Wolheim-Wiener, Irene folder 50
- Womack, J. Printise folder 122, 125
- Womersley, John folder 222, 240
- Woodbridge, M.J. folder 13
- Woodbury, Max A. folder 159
- Woods, F.S. folders 33, 35
- Woods, Hole Oceanographic Institute folder 98

- Woods, James H. folder 12
- World Book Encyclopedia folder 250
- World Socialist Party folder 138
- World Youth Forum folder 297
- Worterbuch Der Soziologie folder 274
- Wright, Willard Huntington. See Van Dine, S.S
- Wylie, F.E., (Jeff) folder 284
- Wyllie, J. folder 39
- Yaglom, A.M. folder 282
- Yale University folders 256, 258, 284, 286, 294, 298, 299, 301, 307, 309
- Yang, S.C. folder 38
- Young, John Z. folders 143, 145
- Young, L.C. folders 36, 40, 49, 96, 99, 152
- Young, R. Cecily folders 36, 37, 38, 49, 51, 52
- Zabara, Jacob folder 326
- Zache, Lothor folder 236
- Zakheim, Bernard folder 265
- Zea, Leopoldo folder 105
- Zeman, Jiri folders 332, 334
- Ziebolz, H. folder 99
- Zorn, Max folder 69
- Zwinz-Breyer, Maria folders 192, 197
- Zymund, Antoni folders 36, 37, 54, 55, 56, 68, 76

# **Collection Inventory**

#### Series 1. Correspondence 1920-1981

#### **Scope and contents note**

The series includes both personal and professional correspondence. Letters to Wiener precede his responses if there are incoming and outgoing letters on the same day. For the more voluminous correspondence (1950-1964), the processor added a bracketed date to the bottom of each incoming letter that indicates the date of Wiener's response.

See the index of correspondence to locate specific correspondents.

	Box	Folder
Correspondence 1920, undated	1	1-21
Correspondence 1921-1934	2	22-40
Correspondence 1935-1939	3	41-54
Correspondence 1939-1945	4	55-69
Correspondence 1946-1948	5	70-84
Correspondence 1948-1949	6	85-99
Correspondence 1949-1950	7	100-114
Correspondence 1950	8	115-127
Correspondence 1950-1951	9	12-8142

Correspondence 1951-1952	10	143-157
Correspondence 1952-1953	11	15-8170
Correspondence 1953	12	171-183
Correspondence 1953-1954	13	184-197
Correspondence 1954-1955	14	19-8211
Correspondence 1955-1957	15	212-225
Correspondence 1957	16	226-238
Correspondence 1957-1958	17	239-254
Correspondence 1958-1959	18	255-266
Correspondence 1959-1960	19	267-280
Correspondence 1960-1961	20	281-295
Correspondence 1961-1962	21	296-309
Correspondence 1962-1963	22	310-322
Correspondence 1963	23	323-334
Correspondence 1964-1981	24	335-341

Series 2. Biographical and Personal Information

#### Scope and contents note

The series includes graduation programs and programs from professional activities; general records such as certificates, school grades, army records, and trip itineraries; patent data; bibliographies; travel photographs; and newspaper clippings with the exception of book reviews. Also included is information about Margaret Wiener, including genealogies, wedding documents, and household notes.

	Box	Folder
Biographical data	25A	342
Family photographs and slides	40A	1125а-е
Selected photographs	40A	1126a,b
Retirement photographs 1960	40B	1127
School grades, etc. 1904 to 1905, 1910, 1915	25A	344
	Box	Folder
Certificates 1910-1960	25A	343
World War I war records	25A	345
Margaret Wiener - family genealogy and documents	25A	345a
Margaret Wiener and Norbert Wiener, wedding documents	25A	345b
Margaret Wiener - household notebooks circa 1950s	25A	345c
Margaret Wiener - "Suggestions for reading"	25A	345
Passports	25A	346
Itineraries	25A	347

Indian trip 1954	25A	348
Travel photographs - India 1954	40C	1130
Japanese trip 1956	25A	349
Japan trip, photographs presented by Japan Broadcasting Corporation 1956	25A	349a
Travel photographs - Japan 1956	40B	1128а-е
Travel photographs - Spain, Italy, Russia, Mexico	40B	1129
Norbert Wiener portrait photograph approximately 1955	40C	1131
Obituary information	25A	350
Organization information	25A	351
College Entrance Examinations Board Commission on Exams in Math 1934-1935	25A	352
Cybernetics organizations	25A	353
International Congress of Mathematicians, Organizing Committee 1939, 1950	25A	354
Lecture schedules	25A	355
MIT mathematics courses	25A	356
MIT mathematics department information	25A	357
Student records	25A	358

Possible subjects in philosophy	25A	359
Patent data, Yuk Wing Lee and Wiener	25B	360
Patent agreement, Yuk Wing Lee and Wiener	36	361
Patent data of others	36	362-363
Bibliographies 1913-1918, 1913-1936, 1913-1964	36	364
Bibliography about cybernetics 1953, undated	36	365
Bibliography about mathematical applications to physiological problems	36	366
Bibliography file	36	367-369
Programs 1906-1913, 1931-1964	25B	370-372
Programs 1906-1913, 1931-1964	25C	373-374
Newspaper clippings 1906-1964	25C	375-383
Newspaper articles, Russian 1960-1962	25C	384
Printed material	25C	385
		Box
#9 - Awards dinner held in honor of Wiener, with speeches by Julius A. Strat Richard Brauer, Jerome B. Wiesner, Ronald L. McFarlan, Walter A. Rosenbl William Ted Martin, audio tape recording 1961 February 11		39
#10 - Awards dinner continue, audio tape recording 1961 February 11		39

Japanese television interview with Norbert and Margaret Wiener, 30 minutes, black and white 1956

38c

#### Series 3. Student Notes, Professional Writings and Lectures

#### Scope and contents note

The series includes both published and unpublished writings in the form of handwritten and typed manuscripts, galleys, page proofs, reprints of lectures, speeches, articles, notes, books, reviews, and contract agreements. Reviews and contract agreements follow the appropriate manuscript.

The writings are in alphabetical order by title within each year. Published writings have been filed by the year of publication, while unpublished works are filed by the year written. Some of these dates were approximated by the processor; these estimates are indicated by a circa before the year or a span of years. The manuscripts that could not be dated precede the rest (see folders 386-406).

	Box	Folder
Unidentified mathematical worksheets undated	26A	386-390
Unidentified cards with numbers undated	26A	391-392
Unidentified fragments of papers undated	26A	393-394
Unidentified paste-ups of equations undated	26A	395
Unidentified page proof undated	26A	396
Unidentified fragment of lecture series undated	26A	397
Unidentified manuscripts, in French undated	26A	397a
Untitled course notes about ergodic theory and prediction undated	26B	398-399

Untitled fragments about prediction undated	26B	400
Titled fragments undated	26B	401
"Literary Imagination" undated	26B	402
"A Method of Defining Identity" undated	26B	403
"A New Definition of a Class" undated	26B	404
"On the Elementary Nature of the Prime Number Theorem" undated	26B	405
"Priority" undated	26B	406
Anatomical drawings 1900-1910	26B	407
Chemistry notebooks	26B	408
Chemistry notes	26B	409-410
English themes	26B	411
German exercises	26B	412
Italian notebooks	26B	413
Latin exercises	26B	414
Mathematics notebooks	26C	415-416
Physics notebooks	26C	417
School notebooks	26C	418-419
Writing notebook 1903	26C	420

"The Theory of Ignorance" 1906	26C	421
Poetry undated	26C	421a
Poetry 1906-1908	26C	422
"Color-vision, and Color-blindness" 1910-1913	26C	423
"Critical Monism"	26C	424
"A Criticism of Spaulding's 'A Defense of Analysis' "	26C	425
"The Emotions and the Normative Science"	26C	426
"An Example of the Use of Analogy in Historical Research"	26C	427
"The Fallacy of Historiometrical Method"	26C	428
"The Nature of the Goal of Moral Action"	26C	429
"On the Psychology of Racial Differences"	26C	430
Philosophy notebooks	26C	431
"The Place of Teleology in Science"	26C	432
Psychology notebooks	26	433
"The Rationalism of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz"	26	434
"The Method of Mendelian Analysis" circa 1910	26	435
"The Phylogenetic Development of the Brain"	26	436

"The Contributions of the Known and the Objectin the Anatomical Diagram"	26	437
"Is Will Prior to Reason?"	26	438
"The Limits of Possible and of Reasonable Doubt"	26	439
Philosophy examinations	26	440
Philosophy papers 1911	26	441
"The Relations Between Certain Series Observed in the White Mountains"	27A	442
"Summary of a Paper by Mr. Thomson at the Fourth Meeting of the Seminar" circa 1911	27A	443
Philosophy notebooks 1911-1912	27A	444
"A Criticism of Berkeley's Theory of Knowledge" circa 1912	27A	445
"Operations in Complex Algebra Isomorphic with Addition and Multiplication"	27A	446
"The Place of Relations and Terms in Experience"	27A	447
"The Place of Relations in Knowledge and Reality," Bowdoin essay 1912	27A	448
"Reason and Sense-experience in Descartes"	27A	449
"Scepticism" circa 1912	27A	450
"An Alternative to the Method of Postulates" 1913-1915	27A	451

"Bertrand Russell's Theory of the Nature of Reality"	27A	452
"Certain Theorems Concerning the Limits Sequences of Continuous Functions"	27A	453
"A Comparison Between the Treatment of the Algebra of Relations by Schröder and that by Whitehead and Russell," Ph.D. thesis 1913	27A	454-458
"On a Method of Rearranging the Positive Integers in a Series of Ordinal Number Greater than that of Any Given Fundamental Sequence of Omega"	27B	459
"A Contribution to the Theory of Relative Position" 1914	27B	460
Gruppentheoretische Aufgaben circa 1914	27B	461
"The Highest Good" 1914	27B	462
"On an Article by Dr. Schweitzer" circa 1914	27B	463
"Relativism" 1914	27B	464
"A Simplification of the Logic of Relations" 1914	27B	465
"Studies in Synthetic Logic"	27B	466
"The Theory of Types" circa 1914	27B	467
Writings of Bertrand Russell and Wiener	27B	468
"Approximation" 1915-1920	27B	469
Definitions and proofs	27B	470

"Functional Equations in Symbolic Logic"	27B	471
"Space and Time"	27B	472
"Definitions of the Fundamental Notions of Projective Geometry in Terms of the Relation of Intersection among Convex Surfaces" circa 1915	27B	473
"A Further Contribution to the Theory of Relative Position"	27B	474
"Is Mathematical Certainty Absolute?" 1915	27B	475
"On Kinds of Magnitude with Definite Maxima" circa 1915	27B	476
"On the Measurement of Sensory Qualities"	27B	477
"On the Nature of Sensation-intensities and Qualities"	27B	478
"The Shortest Line Dividing an Area in a Given Ratio" 1915	27B	479
Philosophy lecture notes 1915-1916	27B	480
"Symbolic Logic as an Instrument of Research," lecture	27B	481
"The Method of Postulates in Modern Mathematics" circa 1916	27B	482
"Mr. Lewis and Implication (The Nature of Implication)" 1916	27B	483
"A New Analysis of Temporal Relations" circa 1916	27B	484
Review: Science and Religion: The Rational and the Superrationa by C.J. Keyser 1916	27B	485
Review: A Theory of Time and Space by A. A. Robb	27B	486

"What Constitutes a Mathematical System?" circa 1916	27B	487
"Space and Geometry," lecture notes 1916-1917	27C	488
"Certain Formal Invariances in Boolean Algebras" 1917	27C	489
Review: The Human Worth of Rigorous Thinking by C. J. Keyser	27C	490
"The Small College"	27C	491
"Aesthetics," "Duty," "Ecstasy," Encyclopedia Americana 1918	27C	492
Review: <i>The Continuum and Other Types of Serial Order</i> by E. V. Huntington	27C	493
"Unconventionality" circa 1918	36	494
"Royalism in Germany" circa 1919	27C	495
"Mathematical and Logical Certainty" 1920-1930	27C	496
"A Mathematical System of Substitution Cipher"	27C	497
Untitled fragment about WW I demobilization circa 1920	27C	498
"Bilineal Operations Generating All Operations Rational in a Domain Omega" 1920	27C	499
"Certain Iterative Characteristics of Bilinear Operations"	27C	500
"Certain Iterative Properties of Bilinear Operations"	27C	501
"Daniell Integration in Function Space circa 1920	27C	502
"The Iteration of Bilinear Operations"	27C	503

"The Mean of a Functional of Arbitrary Elements" 1920	27C	504
"Notes on a Paper by Professor Daniell" circa 1920	27C	505
"On the Theory of Sets of Points in Terms of Continuous Transformations" 1920	36	506
"A Set of Postulates for Fields"	27C	507
"Thought and Meaning" circa 1920	27C	508
"The United States as Mandatory"	27C	509
"Analysis Situs in Terms of Sequential Limits" circa 1921	27C	510
"The Average of an Analytic Functional and the Brownian Motion" 1921	27C	511
"The Isomorphic Transformations of Complex Algebra"	27C	512
"A New Method for Solving Integral Equations"	27C	513
"A New Theory of Measurement; A Study in the Logic of Mathematics"	27C	514
"The Notion of Continuous Transformation in Abstract Sets" circa 1921	27C	515
"The Postulate-Method and the Map Problem"	27C	516
"A Set of Postulates for Circular Order"	27C	517
"A Set of Postulates for n-Dimensional Analysis Situs"	27C	518
"A Categorical Set of Postulates for Non-Sequential Limits on a Line" circa 1922	36	519
"The Group of the Linear Continuum" 1922	36	520

"Set of Postulates for Limit on a Line" circa 1922	36	521
"On the Nature of Mathematical Objects (Naive Mathematics)" circa 1923	27C	522
Verallgemeinerte trigonometrische Entwicklungen 1925	27C	523
Heaviside biography circa 1930	27C	524
"Uber Eine Klasse Singularer Integratgleucheune" 1931	27C	524A
"Analytic Properties of the Characters of Infinite Abelian Groups," by R.E.A.C. Paley and Wiener 1932	27C	525
"Note on a Paper of Kaczniarz," by N.E.A.C. Paley and Wiener circa 1932	27C	526
"A Note on Tauberian Theorems" 1932	27C	527
"Tauberian Theorems"	27C	528
Bocher prize, speech 1933	27C	529
"Characters of Abelian Groups," by R.E.A.C. Paley and Wiener	27C	530
The Fournier Integral and Certain of its Applications, review	27C	531
"Notes on the Theory and Application of Fournier Transforms," by R. E.A.C. Paley and Wiener	27C	532
"On a Theorem of Zygmund," by R. E. A. C. Paley and Wiener circa 1933	27C	533
"A One-Sided Tauberian Theorem" 1933	27C	534

"Pure and Applied Mathematics" circa 1933	28A	535
"R.E.A.C. Palley - In Memorium" 1933	28A	536
"Aid for German Refugee Scholars Must Come from Non-academic Sources" 1934	28A	537
"A Class of Gap Theorems"	28A	538
"Random Functions in the Complex Domain"	28A	539
"Biographical Sketch of Phillip Franklin" circa 1935	28A	540
"Fabry's Gap Theorem" 1935	28A	541
"Limitations of Science"	28A	542
"Once More The Refugee Problem Abroad". 1935	28A	543
"Random Function"	28A	544
"A Theorem of Carleman"; "Notes on the Kron Theory of Tensors in Electrical Machinery" 1936	28A	545
Professor's Progress 1937	37	546-548
General Note		
These folders closed until 2020.		
"The Homogeneous Chaos" 1938	28A	549
New York Times letter about professionalization of U.S. State Department circa 1938	28A	550

"Convergence Properties of Analytic Functions of Fourier - Stieltjes Transforms," by R.H. Cameron and Wiener 1939	28A	551
"The Ergodic Theorem"	28A	552
"A Generalization of Ikehara's Theorem" by H.R. Pitt and Wiener	28A	553
"New Methods in Statistical Mechanics," by B. McMillan and Wiener	28A	554
"On Singular Distributions," by A. Wintner and Wiener	28A	555
"The Use of Statistical Theory in the Study of Turbulence"	28A	556
"Memorandum on the Mechanical Solution of Partial Differential Equations" circa 1940	28A	557
"Memorandum on the Scope, etc., of a Suggested Computing Machine" 1940	28A	558
"What is Statistical Mechanics?" circa 1940	28A	559
Final report about design of a predicting network circa 1942	28A	560
"On the Oscillation of the Derivatives of a Periodic Function," by G. Polya and Wiener 1942	28A	561
"The Extrapolation, Interpolation and Smoothing of Stationary Time Series." 1942	28A	561A
"Behavior Purpose and Teleology," by A. Rosenblueth, J. Bigelow, and Wiener 1943	28A	562
Lifetime of Learning	37	563-568

## **General Note**

These folders closed until 2020.

"Scenario for a Novel"	37	569
General Note		
This folder closed until 2020.		
"Operationalism - Old and New" 1945	28A	570
"A Generalization of the Wiener-Hopf Integral Equation," by A. Heins and Wiener 1946	28A	571
"The Mathematical Formulation of the Problem of Conduction of Impulses in a Network of Connected Excitable Elements, Specifically in Cardiac Muscle," by A. Rosenblueth and Wiener	28A	572
"A Scientist Rebels" 1947	28A	573
"An Account of the Spike Potential of Axons" by W. Pitts, J.G. Ramos, A. Rosenblueth, F. Webster and Wiener 1948	28A	574
"The Chess Playing Machine and the Machine which Governs"	28A	575
Cybernetics	28A	576
Cybernetics	28A	577-578
Cybernetics	28B	579-591
Cybernetics, French translation	28C	592-593
Cybernetics, German translation, preface	28C	594

Cybernetics, Japanese translation, preface	28C	595
Cybernetics, publishing agreement 1961	28C	596
Cybernetics, reviews	28C	597-598
"Internationalization of Science"	28C	599
"Randomness and Extrapolation" circa 1948	28C	600
"A Rebellious Scientist after Two Years" 1948	28C	601
Whom the Gods Love, by L. Infelt 1948	28C	602
"World Politics in the Atomic Age" circa 1948	28C	603
"The Characteristic Properties of Linear and Non-Linear Systems" circa 1949	28C	604
"Chess-Playing Automata, The Turk, Mephisto and Ajeeb" 1949	28C	605
Dynamics of the Nervous System, A. Rosenblueth, Wiener et al. circa 1949	28C	606-609
"L'extrapolation, l'interpolation et la polissage des suites aleatoires stationnaires"	28C	610
"Godfrey Harold Hardy, 1877-1947" 1949	28C	611
"The Impact of Statistical Mechanics on Modern Physics and Physiology" circa 1949	28C	612
"The Machine Age" 1949	28 D	613

"The Method of Autocorrelation in the Study of Electroencephalograms" circa 1949	28 D	614
"A New Concept of Communication Engineering (The Nature of Communication Engineering)" 1949	28 D	615
"On an Array with a Single Spectrum"	28 D	616
Preface about time series	28 D	617
The Mathematical Theory of Communication	28 D	618
"The Second Industrial Revolution and the New Concept of the Machine"	28 D	619
Sixth Macy Conference, transcript	36	620-622
"Some Problems in Sensory Prosynthesis," by L. Levine, J. Wiesner, and Wiener	28 D	623
"Sound Communication with the Deaf"	28 D	624
"A Statistical Analysis of Synaptic Excitation," by W. Pitts, J.G. Ramos, A. Rosenblueth, and Wiener	28 D	625
"Sur la Theorie de la Prevision statistique et du filtrage des ondes" 1949	28 D	626
Time Series	28 D	627-628
Time Series, publishing agreement	28 D	629
"Active Fields in Mathematics Since the Beginning of the Century" 1950-1960	28 D	630

"Atomic Knowledge of Good and Evil" 1950	28 D	631
"The Brain"	28 D	632
"Communication and Secrecy in the Modern World"	28 D	633
"Comprehensive View of Prediction Theory"	28 D	634
"The Concept of Group Transformation and of Group Characteristics," course notes	28 D	635
"The Economic Significance of Atomic Energy if Applied to Peacetime Use"	29A	636
"Entropy and Information," page proof	29A	637
"How U.S. Cities Can Prepare for Atomic War (Cities that Survive the Bomb)," by K. Deutch, G. De Santillana, and Wiener	29A	638
Human Use of Human Beings	29A	639-650
Human Use of Human Beings, reviews and announcements	29B	651-653
Human Use of Human Beings	29B	653a
"La Mente y la Maquina" circa 1950	29B	654
"The Nature of Analogy" 1950	29B	655
"Newtonian and Bergsonian Time" circa 1950	29B	656
Prologue: Rossum's Universal Robots, by K. Capek 1950	29B	657
"Responsible Man in the Machine Age" circa 1950	29B	658

"The Role of the Semigroup in Mathematical Physics" 1950	29B	659
"Science et Avenir"	29B	659A
"Some Maxims for Biologists and Psychologists"	29B	660
"Some Physical Analogies in Sociology"	29B	661
"Some Prime Number Consequences of the Ikehara Theorem," by L. Gellert and Wiener	29B	662
"Speech, Language, and Learning"	29B	663
"Too Damn Close"	29B	664
"The Computing Machine and Form (Gestalt)," speech 1951	29B	665
Conferences Françaises, lectures	29B	666-668
Cybernetics - a dictionary definition	29B	669
"Cybernetics and Philosophy"	29B	670
"La Cybernetique," speech	29B	671
"The End of Educational Waste (America and its future Cultural Contribution to the World)"	29C	672
"Homeostasis in the Individual and Society"	29C	673
"A Linear Method for Determining the Flow of Causality"	29C	674
"Mathematical Relationships of Possible Significance in the Study of Human Leukemia" by P. F. Hahn and Wiener	29C	675

Problems of Sensory Prostesis"	29C	676
"Suggestions of a Unified Theory of Physics"	29C	677
American Physical Society paper about quantum theory 1952	29C	678
"The Book and the Church"	29C	679
Comments about McCarran Act, diplomacy, scientists 1952	29C	680
"Cybernetics (Light and Maxwell's Demon)"	29C	681
"The Day of the Dead," by M. Chafetz, P. Wiener, and Wiener	29C	682
"Measurement of Information" circa 1952	29C	683
"The Miracle of the Broom Closet" 1952	29C	684
"A Treatise on Cybernetics"	29C	685
Voice of America speech	29C	686
"Causality and Information," speech 1953	29C	687
"The Concept of Homeostasis in Medicine"	29C	688
"Cybernetics"	29C	689
"Cybernetics," encyclopedia definition	29C	690
"Distributions quantiques dans l'espace differentiel pour les fonctions," by A. Siegel and Wiener	29C	691
"The Electronic Brain and the Next Industrial Revolution"	29C	692

Ex-Prodigy	29C	693-697
Ex-Prodigy	30A	69-8711
Ex-Prodigy	30B	712-724
Ex-Prodigy, publishing agreement	30B	725
Ex-Prodigy, reviews	30B	726
		Box
"Autobiography of an Ex-Prodigy", typescript		41
Correspondence regarding Ex-Prodigy 1952		41
Correspondence from Wiener to Helen Deutsch ("Mother") regarding Ex-	Prodigy 1952	41
	Box	Folder
"From the Computing Machine to the Automatic Factory," speech	<b>Box</b> 30B	Folder 727
"From the Computing Machine to the Automatic Factory," speech  "The Future of Automatic Machinery"		
	30B	727
"The Future of Automatic Machinery"  "High Speed and secular Phenomena in Computing Machines" circa	30B 30C	727 728
"The Future of Automatic Machinery"  "High Speed and secular Phenomena in Computing Machines" circa 1953	30B 30C 30C	727 728 729
"The Future of Automatic Machinery"  "High Speed and secular Phenomena in Computing Machines" circa 1953  "Ideas for an Outline of a Treatise on Cybernetics" 1953	30B 30C 30C	727 728 729 730
"The Future of Automatic Machinery"  "High Speed and secular Phenomena in Computing Machines" circa 1953  "Ideas for an Outline of a Treatise on Cybernetics" 1953  International EEG Conference 1953	30B 30C 30C 30C	727 728 729 730 731

"The Mutual Influence of Physics and Medicine," speech	30C	735
"A New Form of the Statistical Postulate of Quantum Mechanics," by A. Siegel and Wiener	30C	736
"On a New Approach to Quantum Theory"	30C	737
Operations Research Group speech	30C	738
"Optics and the Theory of Stochastic Processes"	30C	739
"Problems of Organization," speech	30C	740
Review: Design for a Brain, by W. Ross Ashby	30C	741
Review: Modern Science and Modern Man, by J.B. Conant	30C	742
"The Use of the Automatic Machine"	30C	743
"We Can't Attain Truth without Risk of Error," This I Believe, transcript	30C	744
Untitled article regarding automatic factories circa 1954	30C	745
"Automatization (Automatic Factories: Fact and Fiction), " by D. Campbell and Wiener 1954	30C	746
"Conspiracy of Conformists"	30C	747
Electroencephalograph data	30C	748
"The Foundations of Quantum Theory," by A. Siegel and Wiener	30C	749
"Men, Machines, and the World About," transcript	30C	750
New York Times article about scientific methodology 1954	30C	751

The Philosophy of Invention	30C	752-753
The Philosophy of Invention	30	754-757
"A Scientist Reappears" ca. 1954	31A	758
The Search, script 1954	31A	759
"Definition of Cybernetics," encyclopedia definition 1955	31A	760
"The Differential-Space Theory of Quantum Systems (The Differential-Space Theory of Quantum Mechanics," by A. Siegel and Wiener	31A	761
"The Dynamics of a Population of One Species," by J.B.S. Haldane and Wiener	31A	762
"The Grammar of the Semi-exact Sciences"	36	763-764
"The Impact of Communication Engineering on Philosophy" circa 1955	31A	765
"Multiple Prediction," by B. Rankin and Wiener 1955	31A	766
"Non-Linear Prediction and Dynamics"	31A	767
"On the Factorization of Matrices"	31A	768
"Thermodynamics of the Message"	31A	769
"Time and Organization"	31A	770-771
"Brain Waves and the Interferometer," lecture 1956	31A	772
I am a Mathematician	31A	773-776
I am a Mathematician	31B	777-786

I am a Mathematician	31C	787
I am a Mathematician, reviews	31C	794-796
Japan Productivity Center Conference speech circa 1956	31	797
"The Main Ideas of Cybernetics," lecture	31	798
"Measure and Probability," lecture	31	799
"The Origins of Cybernetics," lecture ca. 1956	31	800
"Pure Patterns in a Natural World" 1956	31	801
"Quantum Theory and Wave Packets" circa 1956	31	802
"Servomechanisms and the Automatic Factory," lecture	36	803-804
"Theory of Measurement in Differential-Space Quantum Theory," by A. Siegel and Wiener 1956	31	805
"Theory of Prediction"	31	806
"The Definition and Ergodic Properties of the Stochastic Adjoint of a Unitary Transformation," by E. Akutowicz and Wiener 1957	32A	807
"Electroencephalography and Instrumentation," transcript	32A	808
"Intellectual Precocity, its Nature and Fate"	32A	809
"Introduction to Mathematical Encephalography" circa 1957	32A	810
"The Mathematical Study of Rhythms in the Electroencephalogram"	32A	811
"Mathematics as a Part of Intellectual History" 1957	32A	812

"My Function as a College Professor"	32A	813
"Notes on Polya's and Turan's Hypotheses Concerning Liouville's Factor," by A. Winter and Wiener	32A	814
"On the Non-Vanishing of Euler Products," by A. Wintner	32A	815
"On the Perturbed Clock"	32A	816
"The Prediction Theory of Multivariate Stochastic Processes"	32A	817
"Rhythms in Physiology with Particular Reference to Electroencephalography," Rudolf Virchow lecture	32A	818
"The Role of the Small Cultural College in the Education of the Scientists" 1957	32A	819
"A Scientist's Dilemma in a Materialistic World"	32A	820
"Harmonic Analysis and Random Time Functions," by A. Wintner and Wiener 1958	32A	821
"Logique, probabilite et methode des sciences physiques"	32A	822
"The Megabuck Era: Big Science and Sound Science"	32A	823
"My Connection with Cybernetics - Its Origins and its Fate"	32A	824
Nonlinear Problems in Random Theory, preface and index	32A	825
Nonlinear Problems in Random Theory, reviews	32A	826
"Physical Origins and Applications of Stochastic Theory," by E. Akutowicz, W. Martin, B. Rankin, A. Siegel, and Wiener	32A	827-828

"Random Time," by A. Wintner and Wiener	32A	829
"The Relation of Cybernetics to Semantics," speech	32A	830
"Sur la prevision lineaire des processus stochastiques vectoriels a densite spectrale bornee," by P. Masani and Wiener	32A	831
"Time and the Science of Organization"	32A	832
"Who Can Speak for Science?"	32A	833
"Elements of Prediction Theory" circa 1959	32A	834
"A Factorization of Positive Hermitian Matrices" 1959	32A	835
"Non-Linear Prediction," by P. Masani and Wiener	32B	836
"On Bivariate Stationary Processes and the Factorization of Matrix- Valued Functions," by P. Masani and Wiener 1959	32B	837
Review: Symposium on Information Theory in Biology, by H. P. Yockey	32B	838
The Tempter	32B	839-848
The Tempter	32C	849-859
"A Sensitive Devil," manuscript	32	859a
The Tempter, reviews	32	860-861
"The Duty of the Intellectual" 1960	33A	862
"Kybernetik"	33A	863
Kybernetiks of natural Systems, by D. Stanley Jones, preface	33A	864

"On the Technical Development of Automatization and Some of its Moral Consequences"	33A	865
Spring School of Physics, Naples, lecture about cybernetics circa 1960	33A	866
Under the Stone, notes on a novel	33A	867
National Science Foundation proposal by J. Barlow, C. Robinson, and Wiener 1961	33A	868
"The Need of Interdisciplinary Thinking," lecture	33A	869
"On the Problem of Designing an Artificial Limb with Action Potential Take-off"	33A	870
"Science and Society"	33A	871
"Scientists and Decision-Making," panel discussion with E. Morrison, C. P. Snow, and Wiener	33A	872
"Über Informationstheori"	33A	873
Contribution to Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Application of Automatic Control in Prosthetics Design 1962	33A	874
"The Mathematics of Self-Organizing Systems" 1962	33A	875
Ninth Congresso Internazionale per L'elettronica, speech	33A	876
"Prolegomena to Theology," Terry Lectures	33A	877-880
No Title	33B	881
"Short-Time and Long-Time Planning"	33B	882

"The Lonely Nationalism of Rudyard Kippling," by K. Deutsch and Wiener 1963	33B	883
"Random Theory in Classical Phase Space and Quantum Mechanics," by G. Della Riccia and Wiener	33B	884
"Fundamental Science in 1984" 1964	33B	885
God and Golem	33B	886-891
God and Golem, reviews	33B	892
"On the Oscillations of Nonlinear Systems"	33B	893
Progress in Biocybernetics, ed. by J. Schade and Wiener	33B	894
"Quantum Theory and Brownian Motion," by G. Della Riccia and Wiener 1965	33B	895
Differential-Space, Quantum Systems and Prediction, by A. Siegel, B. Rankin, W. T. Martin, and Wiener, reviews and publishing agreement 1966	33B	896
Generalized Harmonic Analysis and Tauberian Theorems, reviews	33B	897
"Wave Mechanics in Classical Phase Space, Brownian Motion, and Quantum Theory," by G. Della Riccia and Wiener	33B	898
		Box
11 volumes of foreign language editions of Wiener publications		38A
14 volumes of foreign language editions of Wiener publications		38B
10 volumes of foreign language editions of Wiener publications		38C

#2 - Air Force Cambridge Research Lab (AFCRL) Colloquium, regarding medical prosthesis, audio tape recording 1963 May 14	39
#3 - AFCRL Colloquium continued, audio tape recording 1963 May 14	39
#4 - Commentary on "Science and Society" based on article by Weiner, given by unidentified woman, audio tape recording 1961	39
#5 - Colloquium, possibly in Amsterdam, with discussion led by Wiener, audio tape recording undated	39
#6 - Unidentified colloquium continued, audio tape recording undated	39
#7 - Lecture, "Intellectual Honesty and the Contemporary Scientist," by Wiener, held at MIT, audio tape recording 1963 April 18	39
#8 - Lecture, "I've Been Reading," by Wiener and Isaac Asimov, audio tape recording 1956 September 27	39

### Series 4. Incoming Scientific Correspondence, Lectures, and Reports

#### Scope and contents note

Norbert Wiener's office staff kept papers and publications that were sent to Wiener; these writings have been retained in the collection. The series includes typewritten, handwritten and printed manuscripts of articles, lectures, reports, and notes.

Anonymous works precede the identified articles and are arranged alphabetically by title (see folders 899-1124).

**Box** Folder

Unidentified fragments	33B	899
"Automated Control Systems"	33B	900
"The Automatic Factory"	33B	901
"Brain Waves at King's College"	33B	902
"The Case of the Wiener Children"	33B	903
"Charts in Coma Cluster of Galaxies"	33B	904
"Computer Electronics for the Layman"	33B	905
"The Contradiction"	33C	906
"Derivation of the Density of Pairs of Roots"	33C	907
"Experimental Determination of Correlation Functions and the Application in the Statistical Theory of Communication"	33C	908
"Fundamentals of Instruction"	33C	909
"Jubilee of Light"	33C	910
"A New Approach to the Many Body Problems"	33C	911
"Notation"	33C	912
"Operating Procedure for Coradi Harmonic Analyzer"	33C	913
"Philosophical Import of Wiener's Law of Communications"	33C	914
"Religion, Nameless, Always Today's"	33C	915

"Renseignements de M. Gourevitch"	33C	916
Adams, Elliot Q.	33C	917
Angeluscheff, Zhivko D.	33C	918
Asenjo, Florencio Gonzales	33C	919
Austin, H.D.	33C	920
Bailey, David Algar	33C	921
Barlow, John S.	33C	922
Beorse, Bryn	33C	923
Berne, Eric	33C	924
Blanchard, Arthur F.	33C	925
Boas, Ralph P.	33C	926
Bohr, Harald	33C	927
Bouligand, Georges	33C	928
Braitenberg, Valentino	33C	929
Brandao, G.	33C	930
Brillouin, Leon	33C	931
Bronowski, J.	33C	932
Brown, Gordon S.	33C	933

Brown, Thomas Shipley	33C	934
Brozen, Yale	33C	935
Buddrius, George W.	33C	936
Bulkley, Dwight H.	33C	937
Campbell, Donald P.	33C	938
Chao, Yuen Ren	33C	939
Chase, Stuart	33C	940
Chavez, Inagcio	33C	941
Cheatham, Thomas P., Jr.	33C	942
Choynowski, Mieczyslaw	33C	943
Clarke, Arthur C.	33C	944
Clymer, Ben	33C	945
Clynes, Manfred	33C	946
Daniel, Cuthbert and Squires, Arthur	33C	947
DeHaven, B. B.	33C	948
DeLange, Hubert	33C	949
DeSantillana, George	33C	950
Dickson, Leonard	33C	951

Doob, Joseph	33	952-954
Drenick, F. R.	33	956
Dubarle, P.	33	957
Duffield, J.	33	958
Dunn, Halbert L.	33	959
Eastman, Don	33	960
Eisenberg, Leon	33	961
Ellis, Weldon	33	962
Ettelson, Harry W.	33	963
Feinstein, A.	34A	964
Fenyes, Imre	34A	965
Fire, A. A.	34A	966
Forges, George	34A	967
Foster, A. A.	34A	968
Fromm, Erich	34A	969
Gabor, Denis	34A	970
Gamillschleg, Ernst	34A	971
Gamo, Hideya	34A	972

Gilbert, F.	34A	973
Goodman, T.P., see also: Reswick, J.B.	34A	974
Grisoff, Stephan F.	34A	975
Groell, Luciano P.	34A	976
Gruenbaum, Adolf	34A	977
Hageman, Lloyd	34A	978
Hainer, R. M.	34A	979
Haldane, John Burden Sanderson	34A	980
Hardy, George H.	34A	981
Harms, Meint	34A	982
Hartley, Harold	34A	983
Hatori, Tsukasa	34A	984
Hauptman, H. see: Karle, J.		
	Box	Folder
Haus, H.A.	34A	985
Hauser, Ernst A.	34A	986
Hawkins, J.N.A.	34A	987
Heider, Fritz	34A	988

Herzog	34A	989
Hilibrand, Murray	34A	990
Hildon, Alice Mary	34A	991
Hitchcock, Frank L.	34A	992
Hofstadter, Samuel H.	34A	993
Hollitscher, Walter	34A	994
Holubar, Josef	34A	995
Honigman, Aaron	34A	996
Hori, Jun-ichi	34A	997
Hosokawa, Tadasu	34A	998
Huffman, David A.	34A	999
Hunt, R.S.	34B	1000
Huntington, Edward V.	34B	1001
Hurd, Louis	34B	1002
Ikehara, Shikao	34B	1003
Imahori, Katsumi	34B	1004
Irtem, Ali	34B	1005
Iverson, Olav Hilmar	34B	1006

Jessen, B rge	34B	1007
Jourard, Sidney M.	34B	1008
Ka , Marc	34B	1009
Kahn, Rudolf F.	34B	1010
Kalinske, A.A.	34B	1011
Kanner, Oscar	34B	1012
Karle, J. and Hauptman, H.	34B	1013
Kelly, Brenton	34B	1014
Kemp, Robert	34B	1015
Klambauer, Gabriel	34B	1016
Knoll, Max and Kugler, J.	34B	1017
Kogan, Isaac	34B	1018
Koosis, Paul	34B	1019
Korzybski, Alfred	34B	1020
Kosambi, D. D.	34B	1021
Kurtz, Howard G.	34B	1022
Kutzner, Hugo R. Paul	34B	1023
Lacker, Edward	34B	1024

Landauer, Carl	34B	1025
Larson, E.H.	34B	1026
Levinson, Norman	34B	1027
Levy, Paul	34B	1028
Lowenstein, Jerold J.	34B	1029
McKean, Henry P.	34B	1030
McMillan, Brockway	34B	1031
Marshall, Thomas	34B	1032
Maruyama, Magoroh	34B	1033
Masani, Pesi	34B	1034
Maxie, E.R.	34B	1035
Mayne, Robert	34B	1036
Meister, Ralph K.	34B	1037
Mornhinweg, Carl	34B	1038
Moruzzi, G.	34B	1039
Moulyn, Adrian C.	34B	1040
Mowrer, O.H.	34B	1041
Mullenix, R.C.	34B	1042

Myhill, John R.	34B	1043
Nelson, Alfred L.	34B	1044
Newman, E.	34B	1045
Ney, John	34B	1046
Nielson, John P.	34C	1047
Nihoul, Jacques C.J.	34C	1048
Offner, F.F.	34C	1049
Ogilvie, Douglas C.	34C	1050
O'Rourke, Neil W.	34C	1051
Osborne, M.F.M.	34C	1052
Otto, Wolfgang	34C	1053
Paley, Raymond Edward Alan Christopher	34C	1054
Papin, Edwin Ross	34C	1055
Parsegian, V.L.	34C	1056
Patterson, A.L.	34C	1057
Paul, Felix	34C	1058
Paynter, H.M.	34C	1059
Perkins, William Harvey	34C	1060

Pitts, Walter	34C	1061
Potter, John Mason	34C	1062
Rankin, Bayard	34C	1063
Reber, J. Marshall	34C	1064
Reiser, Oliver L., see: Vanderjagt, B.G.H.		
	Box	Folder
Reiter, H.J.	34C	1065
Reswick, J.B. and Goodman, T.P.	34C	1066
Riesman, David	34C	1067
Robertson, F. Archibald	34C	1068
Robinson, Charles E.	34C	1069
Robledo, Antonio Gomez	34C	1070
Rosenblueth, Arturo	34C	1071
Ross, B.R.	34C	1072
Roth, Bill	34C	1073
Roudebush, Allen T.	34C	1074
Rukeyser, Muriel	34C	1075
Saito, Toshiya	34C	1076

Samuel, Arthur L.	34	1077
Sargent, Dudley A.	34	1078
Scharf, Joachim-Hermann	34	1079
Scherbak, H.	34	1080
Schmidt, Karl	34	1081
Scriven, Michael	34	1082
Sherry, Earl, see: Ney, John		
	Box	Folder
Siegel, Armand	34	1083
Sights, Irene R.	34	1084
Smith, Standish Gore	35	1085
Snow, Charles Percy	35	1086
Soble, Abraham B.	35	1087
Spencer, Roy C.	35	1088
Spirack, Morris J.	35	1089
Spurway, H.	35	1090
Squires, Arthur, see: Daniel, Cuthbert		
	Box	Folder
Steingardt, Fred	35	1091

Stevens, S.S.	35	1092
Straus, Oliver H.	35	1093
Studley, Duane	35	1094
Sunstein, David E.	35	1095
Szilard, Leo	35	1096
Taylor, Richard	35	1097
Temberley, H.N.V.	35	1098
Terletsky, Yakov P.	35	1099
Thomas	35	1100
Todd, Carlos	35	1101
Törnebohm, Håkan	35	1102
Tunturi, Archie R.	35	1103
Valleé, Robert	35	1104
Vanderjagt, B.G.H. and Reiser, Oliver L.	35	1105
Vergeano	35	1106
Vonnegut, Bernard	35	1107
Walkowicz, Mitchell J.	35	1108
Wallace, Richard A.	35	1109

Watanabe, Satosi	35	1110
Wear, John Horace	35	1111
Weaver, Warren	35	1112
Webster, Fred A.	35	1113
Wei, Ling Y.	35	1114
Weiss, E.B.	35	1115
White, H.C.	35	1116
White, Oliver F.	35	1117
Wiener, Constance	35	1118
Wiener, Leo	35	1119
Wieser, Kurt	35	1120
Witcher, C.M.	35	1121
Woodward, P.M.	35	1122
Wright, Quincy	35	1123
Zeman, Ji i	35	1124