

Anatomy of a Finding Aid

A guide to understanding archival finding aid elements

WHAT'S A FINDING AID?

A finding aid is a research tool (much like the library catalog record) that helps users conduct research by providing a description of an archival collection. A finding aid is a single document that places the materials within a collection in context by providing information such as who created it, when items within the collection were created, relevant biographical or organizational details, the scope of the collection, and how the collection is organized for research use.

Listed below are the common components of most finding aids. **Note:** Not all information will be available for every collection.

PARTS OF A FINDING AID

Summary Information

This section includes information like where the collection is located (the "Repository"), the collection's creator, and the identifier (or "ID") given to the materials by the archives. The Identifier number and title will be useful when requesting materials for your research.

In this collection, dates are also included. The bulk date indicates the dates relevant for the majority of the collection.

The physical description, often labeled as "Extent" is given in linear feet and number of boxes.

This information helps researchers understand how much material

they'll have to work with. This can be very helpful when budgeting time for a research visit!

Repository:	Grand Valley State University Special Collections and University Archives
Creator:	Mee, Francis James, 1899-1990
Title:	Francis J. Mee papers
ID:	RHC-169
Date [inclusive]:	1929-1976
Date [bulk]:	1940-1950
Physical Description:	1.25 Linear feet 6 boxes
Language of the Material:	English .

Biographical or Historical Notes

This section contains information about the collection's creator(s). It details the history of the collection and how it was created. If the collection deals with a administrative body or organization, it may have a "Historical Note" or "Administrative History" instead of biographical information.

Historical Note

Alabastine Company produced a paint-like wall coating from gypsum that was mined from the extensive shale beds abundant in the area surrounding Grand Rapids, Michigan. The company produced colorful advertisements, catalogs, and other promotional material and advertised broadly in magazines such as Ladies Home Journal, the Delineator, and House Beautiful. It advertised its product as a "sanitary" and "hygienic" alternative to more traditional wall coverings of the day.

Scope and Contents

This section provides an overview of the types of materials in the collection. In other words, this section describes what's included in the collection.

Collection Arrangement

Going along with the Scope and Contents note, this section describes how all those materials are actually organized for use. The different sections of the collection (series and subseries) organize collection content by type of material, format, topic, or some other filing system determined by the archival staff, and/or the original creator of the collection.

Access and Restrictions

If there are any restrictions placed on an archival collection that will prevent researchers from having access to it this information will be noted here. Other information in this section includes how the archives received the collection, citation notes and copyright, and storage location.

Collection Inventory

Also referred to as the "Box and Folder List" or "Container List", this section is a box-by-box, folder-by-folder listing of the materials stored in the collection. The level of detail in this section may vary depending on collection scope and individual repository practices.

Scope and Contents

Included in these papers are over 500 manuscripts, comprised of biographical material, correspondence, writings and military documents, and medical and personal records. Biographical material contains information on Francis Mee and his family, as well as a personal history created by the U.S.S. Little Rock Association. Correspondence include letters addressed to Mee, as well as letters from Mee. Writings and military documents are largely comprised of official letters, memos, and orders from the U.S. Navy. Medical and personal records contain Mee's medical history, commendations, membership cards, and Naval Academy Reunion information. Along with these manuscripts, these papers also include over 400 photographs from various points in Mee's career, some of which date back to his time on the Yangtze River Patrol. Various pieces of memorabilia are also included in these papers, including a book about Native Americans in the Great Lakes Area, a medal, Mee's father's leather organizer, a desk name plaque, and sailing caps.

Arrangement

The collection is organized into six series: 1) Biographical, 2) Correspondence, 3) Writings and military documents, 4) Medical and personal records, 5) Photographs, and 6) Memorabilia.

Access to the Materials

Collection is open for research use. Materials may be accessed by request at Special Collections and University Archives in Seidman House. Materials do not circulate.

Publication Rights

The collection is the physical property of Grand Valley State University, but all literary rights are retained by the original creators of materials, their estates, heirs, or third parties. It is the responsibility of the researcher to secure appropriate permissions for publication beyond the bounds of fair use.

Photographs

Title/Description	Instances
Lingayen Photographs	Box 3
Leyte Photographs	Box 3
Guam Photographs, 1 of 2	Box 3
Guam Photographs, 2 of 2	Box 3
Japan Photographs	Box 3
Guam and Japan Photographs	Box 3
Balikpapan Photographs	Box 3
Yangtze Patrol Photographs	Box 4