

**James Percy Ault Papers, 1904-1957  
(Bulk 1904-1929)**



**Carnegie Institution of Washington  
Department of Terrestrial Magnetism Archives  
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# **James Percy Ault Papers, 1904-1957 (Bulk 1904-1929)**

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**Introduction**

*Abstract:* The collection contains the personal papers of Captain James Percy Ault illuminating both his personal and professional lives while an employee of the Carnegie Institution of Washington from 1904 to his death 1929. Ault is primarily remembered as the commander of the non-magnetic research ship, the *Carnegie*.

*Extent:* 12.5 linear feet, 20 document boxes, 1 half-size document box, 7 flat storage boxes

*Acquisition:* The collection was primarily donated by Captain Ault's grandson, Peter Tinsley in 1997. Ault's journals were donated by his daughter Marjorie Ault Donnally in 1957. The two donations were combined during the course of the processing.

*Access Restrictions:* There are no access restrictions to this collection.

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*Preferred Citation:* James Percy Ault Papers, 1904-1957, Department of Terrestrial Magnetism, Carnegie Institution of Washington, Washington, D.C.

*Processing:* Processing completed by Charles Hargrove in 2003.

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**J.P. Ault Biographical Sketch**

James Percy Ault was born in Olathe, Kansas in 1881. He received an A.B. at Baker University in 1904. During his time at Baker Ault served as observatory assistant in the magnetic observatory of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. After his graduation in 1904 Ault joined the Carnegie Institution of Washington (CIW) as a magnetic observer. He remained an employee of the Carnegie Institution for the rest of his life. In 1905, after a short training period, Ault joined the crew of the *Galilee*, a sailing vessel chartered by Carnegie to undertake magnetic research around the globe. Ault remained on the *Galilee* until November 1906. He then made magnetic observations in Northern Mexico until March 1907, when he married Mamie Totten. After marriage, the Aults moved to Washington, D.C. where they remained until Ault's death. In 1908 Ault made a three month canoe trip in the Canadian interior to make magnetic observations. In 1909 Ault received an A.M. degree from Columbia University. Later in the same year he joined the crew of the newly-commissioned research vessel *Carnegie*. The *Carnegie* was a research vessel specifically designed and built for magnetic research. It was constructed of wood and non-ferrous metals so as not to affect

the magnetic observations. Ault was a magnetic observer on Cruise I during 1909 and 1910. During 1911 he did office work at CIW in Washington and in 1912 he led a magnetic survey through Bolivia, Peru and Chile. In 1914 he was appointed Captain of the *Carnegie* for Cruise III, a position he would retain for Cruises IV, VI and VII. The Cruises of the *Carnegie* took Ault around the world several times, including a circumnavigation of Antarctica in 1915-1916 on Cruise IV. During the times between cruises he worked on reducing data collected on the cruises and various magnetic research topics for CIW. One exception to this was his work for the Army in 1918 on the aerial navigation of airplanes using compasses, sextants and astronomical observation. Ault and his wife had three daughters, Evelyn (b. 1912), Ruth (b. 1919) and Marjorie (b. 1923). Ruth died suddenly in 1920 from colitis. Ault was on Cruise VI of the *Carnegie* when Ruth died. The death had a great effect on Ault and nearly led him to resign. He was eventually convinced by his colleagues to continue the cruise. Ault's career was cut short during Cruise VII in 1929 due to an explosion during refueling of the *Carnegie* in Apia, Samoa. The entire ship burned and sank. Ault, and cabin boy Anthony Kolar, were the only fatalities.

### **Scope and Content Note**

This collection consists of the personal papers of Captain James Percy Ault and serves to illuminate both his personal and professional lives while he was an employee of the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

### **Arrangement**

The collection consists of six series in twenty letter-sized document cases, and seven flat storage boxes comprising roughly 12.5 linear feet. There is correspondence, reports, photos, albums, newspaper clippings, and ephemera. Series 1 consists of correspondence, primarily between Ault and his wife. It is the most informative series in the collection with complete chronological coverage of Ault's time at Carnegie. Series 2 covers Ault's work with aerial navigation during WWI. Series 3 consists of articles and reports written by Ault about his travels for the Carnegie Institution. Series 4 consists of Ault's personal journals. Series 5 consists of photographs and albums of Ault's life. Series 6 consists of ephemera presumably collected by Ault or his wife. Series 7 consists of newspaper clippings about the *Carnegie*, the Carnegie Institution, the destruction of the *Carnegie* and other assorted topics.

### **Series 1: Correspondence, 1904-1929, 1930-31, 1949-51, 1953-1954, 1956, 1957**

This series consists of all correspondence saved by James Percy Ault or his wife Mamie Totten. It consists of three subseries arranged into 11 document boxes each are arranged chronologically by author. The vast majority of the correspondence consists of letters between Percy and Mamie, during and before his time with CIW. There is a smaller number of letters between Mamie and Percy and relatives and friends.

### **Series 1, Subseries 1: Letters between James Percy and Ault and Mamie Totten Ault, 1904-1929**

This subseries consists of letters written between James Percy Ault and Mamie Totten Ault between the years 1904 and 1929. Due to the long distances involved and long

delivery times it is impossible to match the letters in a one-to-one correspondence and so the letters are arranged in strict chronological order by author when possible. The Aults were voluminous correspondents and these letters served as a link between them during the many years that Percy was away due to CIW work. Perry's letters contain a great deal of information about the workings of the *Carnegie* and the Carnegie Institution. He frequently writes of his dissatisfaction with his life and how much he misses Mamie and the children. Mamie's letters are filled with news of home and their children. Occasionally a large group of letters was saved in one envelope, such as all of Ault's letters from Cruise IV. In these cases, the letters were left together. A number of the letters were undated except for a day of the week. These could only be sorted into a "Before 1907" group and "After 1907" group based on a change in the salutations before and after the Ault's wedding. After the wedding the letters almost always include the words wife or husband in the salutation. These letters were placed at the end of this subseries.

**Series 1, Subseries 2: Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1905, 1907-1908, 1910, 1912, 1915-1931, 1950-1951, 1953-1954, 1956-1957**

This subseries consists of correspondence to and from Percy and Mamie from family and friends. In many cases, there is no way of identifying the author. The subseries is contained in two letter-sized document boxes. These letters are arranged chronologically. Most are general friendly letters.

**Subseries 3: Cables 1908-1929**

This subseries consists of cables sent to and from Ault while he was on CIW business. The cables are arranged chronologically by year. They are one page each and generally consist of few words. Most are to his wife Mamie. Many of the cables are in code. The code is sometimes translated on the cable. It is unclear if the code was one of the commercially available codes used at the time or a personal code created by Ault and his wife. Because most of the cables are in code it is difficult to say why they were sent. However, there are a few personal cables that are nothing more than declarations of love. The majority of the cables come from Cruise IV, 1914-1917, and Cruise VI, 1919-1921.

**Series 2: Aerial Navigation, 1918-1919, 1922, 1925**

This series consists of correspondence, reports, observations and maps related to Ault's work on developing an effective method of aerial navigation for the Army in 1918. The materials are arranged chronologically.

**Series 3: Articles and Reports, 1908, 1920-23, 1929**

This series contains reports and articles written by Ault describing the particulars of his trips both on land and sea. They are arranged chronologically.

**Series 4: Journals, 1908, 1915-1920, 1922-1923, 1925-1926**

This series consists of personal journals kept by Ault. They are arranged in chronological order. They are very sparse in detail with many blank dates, and other dates that contain only one of two words of description. Probably the most interesting journal is from 1908 and covers Ault's trip in Canada taking magnetic observations.

**Series 5: Photos and Albums, 1905-1916, 1919-1921, 1924?, 1927?, 1928-1929, n.d.**

This series contains loose photographs and photograph albums. In many cases, the photographs were taken by Ault during his time with CIW. The loose photographs are often not labeled and consist of shots of Ault's personal and professional life. The albums serve to document Ault's travels for CIW for the years 1905-1916 including photographs taken at sea as well as photographs from locations such as Easter Island, Tahiti and Japan. They are generally well labeled and in chronological order. Many of the photographs in the albums are duplicates of the photographs in found in the Department's expedition records.

**Series 5, Subseries 1: Albums, 1909-1916**

This subseries consists of albums that Ault kept of his travels for Carnegie. Most of the pictures are labeled. There are three albums covering the years from 1905-1916 and are arranged chronologically.

**Series 5, Subseries 2: Loose Photos, 1914-1916, 1919-1921, 1927(?), n.d.**

This subseries consists of loose photos that show scenes from Ault's personal and professional life. The series is contained in three flat document boxes. There was no discernable original order and in many cases it is impossible to determine the subject, location or time of the photo. This was especially difficult for the personal photos. The professional photos depict life on the *Carnegie*. Many of these were duplicates of photos found in albums and could be provisionally assigned to a particular cruise of the *Carnegie*. The photographs were placed in photograph sleeves with the CIW photographs followed by family candids and portraits. One recognizable series of photos shows the Ault family posing for Christmas photographs on board the *Carnegie*.

**Series 6: Ephemera, [ca. 1905-1930], 1955**

This series contains ephemera collected by Ault and his wife during his life. It is split into two subseries: Carnegie Ephemera and Personal Ephemera. The series contain a wide range of materials from pressed flowers, saved stamps, hymns, articles, children's artwork, calendars, receipts and menus. The series is contained in one letter-sized document box.

**Series 6, Subseries 1: Carnegie Ephemera, 1914, 1920-1922, 1928-1930**

This subseries consists of ephemeral materials directly related to the Carnegie Institution, the *Carnegie* research vessel, or the death of Captain Ault, such as *Carnegie* dinner menus, exhibit announcements, and clippings.

**Series 6, Subseries 2: Personal Ephemera, [ca. 1905-1929], 1955**

This subseries consists of assorted ephemera collect by unknown Aults, presumably primarily J.P. Ault and Mamie Ault. It contains articles, programs, stamps, pressed flowers, poetry, menus, meeting minutes, blank postcards and art and school work by the Ault children.

## Series 7: Clippings, ca. 1914-1930

This series consists of clippings about the Carnegie Institution, the *Carnegie* research vessel and other assorted other topics. It is arranged in chronological order.

### Folder Listing

#### Series 1: Correspondence, 1904-1957, Bulk 1904-1929

	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
<b>Series 1, Subseries 1: Letters between Percy and Mamie, 1904-1929</b>		
Percy to Mamie June-July 1904	1	1
Percy to Mamie July-September 1904		2
Percy to Mamie September-November 1904		3
Percy to Mamie November-December 1904		4
Percy to Mamie January-April 1905		5
Percy to Mamie May-August 1905		6
Percy to Mamie September-December 1905		7
Percy to Mamie January-September 1906		8
Percy to Mamie October-December 1906	2	1
Percy to Mamie 1907		2
Percy to Mamie 1908		3
Percy to Mamie August-September 1909		4
Percy to Mamie September-November 1909		5
Percy to Mamie November-December 1909		6
Percy to Mamie 1910		7
Percy to Mamie September-December 1911		8
Percy to Mamie December 1911		9
Percy to Mamie March-August 1912		10
Percy to Mamie April-November 1914	3	1
Percy to Mamie January-February 1915		2
Percy to Mamie March-July 1915		3
Percy to Mamie July-August 1915		4
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise IV August 1915-July 1916		5
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise IV July 1916-June 1917		6
Percy to Mamie October 1917		7
Percy to Mamie 1918		8
Percy to Mamie 1919	4	1
Percy to Mamie October 1919-February 1920		2
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VI February 1920-July 1920		3
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VI August 1920-April 1921		4
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VI May-November 1921		5
Percy to Mamie 1923		6
Percy to Mamie 1924		7
Percy to Mamie 1925		8
Percy to Mamie 1926		9
Percy to Mamie "Letters from Brooklyn" August-September 1927		10
Percy to Mamie 1927		11

	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VII May-October 1928	5	1
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VII October 1928-February 1929		2
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VII February-June 1929		3
Percy to Mamie <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VII June-November 1929		4
Percy to Mamie Undated Correspondence Before 1907	5	5
Percy to Mamie Undated Correspondence After 1907		6
Mamie to Percy June-August 1904	6	1
Mamie to Percy August-November 1904		2
Mamie to Percy January-April 1905		3
Mamie to Percy May-August 1905		4
Mamie to Percy September-December 1905		5
Mamie to Percy January-March 1906		6
Mamie to Percy April-November 1906		7
Mamie to Percy November-December 1906	7	1
Mamie to Percy 1907		2
Mamie to Percy 1908		3
Mamie to Percy Early 1909		4
Mamie to Percy May, August 1909		5
Mamie to Percy September 1909		6
Mamie to Percy October 1909		7
Mamie to Percy November-December 1909		8
Mamie to Percy 1910		9
Mamie to Percy 1911	8	1
Mamie to Percy March-May 1912		2
Mamie to Percy June-September 1912		3
Mamie to Percy 1913		4
Mamie to Percy April-August 1914		5
Mamie to Percy August-November 1914		6
Mamie to Percy January 1915		7
Mamie to Percy February-March 1915		8
Mamie to Percy March-June 1915		9
Mamie to Percy 1916		10
Mamie to Percy January-April 1917	9	1
Mamie to Percy April-October 1917		2
Mamie to Percy January-September 1918		3
Mamie to Percy September-December 1918		4
Mamie to Percy January-October 1919		5
Mamie to Percy October-December 1919		6
Mamie to Percy January-March 1920		7
Mamie to Percy April-September 1920	10	1
Mamie to Percy September-December 1920		
Mamie to Percy December 1920-October 1921		
Mamie to Percy June 15-September 14, 1921		
Mamie to Percy August-September 1923		
Mamie to Percy September 1923		



	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
Mamie to Percy 1924	11	1
Mamie to Percy 1925		2
Mamie to Percy May-July 1927		3
Mamie to Percy July-November 1927		4
Mamie to Percy October-November 1929		5
Mamie to Percy Undated Correspondence Before 1907 1 of 3	11	6
Mamie to Percy Undated Correspondence Before 1907 2 of 3		7
Mamie to Percy Undated Correspondence Before 1907 3 of 3		8
Mamie to Percy Undated Correspondence After 1907		9
 <b>Series 1, Subseries 2: Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1905-1957, n.d.</b>		
Percy Ault to Mrs. Totten 1905	12	1
Future In-Laws to Percy Ault 1905		2
Correspondence Misc. 1907		3
Mrs. Totten to Percy Ault 1908		4
Percy Ault to Parents 1910		5
Mrs. Totten to Percy 1912		6
Gardener Perry to Percy Ault 1912		7
Evelyn Ault Birth Congratulations 1912		8
Mamie to Totten Relatives 1915		9
Correspondence Misc. 1915		10
Correspondence Misc. 1916		11
Correspondence Misc. 1917		12
Christmas Cards 1908, 1916, 1919, n.d.		13
Ruth Ault Birth Congratulations 1919		14
Correspondence Misc. 1919		15
Correspondence Percy Ault's Mother 1920		16
Examples of Envelopes 1915, 1920		17
Correspondence Misc. 1920		18
Correspondence Professional Ault/Bauer 1916-1920		19
Cables and Letters re: Death of Ruth Ault 1920-1921		20
Correspondence Misc. 1921		21
Correspondence Misc. 1922		22
Marjorie Ault Birth Congratulations 1923	13	1
Correspondence Misc. 1923		2
Professional 1920, 1923		3
Ault/Totten Relatives 1917, 1919, 1920, 1923		4
Birth/Marriage Announcements 1917, 1920, 1926		5
Correspondence Misc. 1926		6
Evelyn Ault Correspondence 1916, 1920-1921, 1923, 1925, 1927, n.d.		7
Correspondence Misc. 1927		8
Radio Messages from <i>Carnegie</i> 1928-1929		9
Ship's Cat Tale Oct. 1929		10
Correspondence Misc. 1929		11
Correspondence re: Death of Captain Ault 1929-1930		12

	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
Oscar Nordman 1949, 1953-1954		13
Marjorie Ault 1956		14
To Mamie 1931, 1950, 1951, 1957		15
Polar Philately and Spoons 1956-1957		16
<i>Carnegie</i> Post Card n.d.		17
Correspondence Misc. n.d.		18

**Series 1, Subseries 3: Cables, 1908-1929**

Cables 1908	14	1
Cables 1909		2
Cables 1910		3
Cables 1911		4
Cables 1912		5
Cables 1914		6
Cables 1915		7
Cables 1916		8
Cables 1917		9
Cables 1918		10
Cables 1919		11
Cables 1920		12
Cables 1921		13
Cables 1923		14
Cables 1925		15
Cables 1926		16
Cables 1928		17
Cables 1929		18
Cables n.d.		19
Cables Drafts n.d.		20

**Series 2: Aerial Navigation, 1918-1925**

Assignment of Ault 1918	15	1
Notes Cahier		2
General Correspondence 1918		3
Correspondence re: Sextants 1918		4
Progress Reports 1918		5
Aerial Nautical Almanac 1918		6
Figures 1918		7
Maps 1918		8
Measurements and Notes 1918		9
Position Line Observations 1918		10
Determination of Deviations of Aeroplane Compasses 1918		11
On Determination of Position of Airplanes by Astronomical Methods 1918		12
On the Navigation of Aircraft by Sextant Observation 1919		13
Principles of Long-Distance Air Navigation 1922		14

	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
Memo re: Airplane Polar Navigation 1925		15
Aerial Navigation Observations and Computations 1918	28	1
<b>Series 3: Articles and Reports, 1908-1929</b>		
Article on Canada Trip 1908	15	16
<i>Carnegie</i> Progress Reports 1920		17
<i>Carnegie</i> Progress Reports 1921		18
AAAS Meeting 1923		19
Reports of <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VII 1929		20
<b>Series 4: Journals, 1908-1926</b>		
Journal 1908	16	1
Journal 1915		2
Journal 1916		3
Journal 1917		4
Journal 1918	17	1
Journal 1919		2
Journal 1920		3
Journal 1922		4
Journal 1923	18	1
Journal 1925		2
Journal 1926		3
<b>Series 5: Photographs and Albums, 1905-1929, n.d.</b>		
<b>Series 5, Subseries 1: Albums 1905-1916</b>		
Album 1905-1909	19	
Album 1909-1914	20	
Album 1915-1916	21	
<b>Series 5, Subseries 2: Loose photographs 1914-1929, n.d.</b>		
<i>Carnegie</i> Duplicates C647-C694, C874-965, 1915-1916	22	1
Cruise IV, 1916		2
Cruise VI, 1919-1921		3
Cruise VI, 1919-1921		4
Solar Eclipse Observatory 1923		5
Cruise VII, 1928-1929		6
<i>Carnegie</i> Assorted Images, n.d.		7
<i>Carnegie</i> Assorted Images, n.d.	23	1
Volcano and Mountain Images, n.d.		2
Ruth Ault Photos, 1919-1920		3
Ault Personal Photos Hawaii 1921?		4
Evelyn and Marjorie Ault 1924?		5
Ault Christmas Photos 1927?		6
Ruth Ault's Grave – Ft. Lincoln, n.d.		7
Ault Family Negatives, n.d.		8

	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
Personal photos, n.d.	24	1
Personal photos, n.d.		2
Large Portraits, n.d.	24	3
<b>Series 6: Ephemera, ca. 1905-1955, Bulk ca. 1905-1930</b>		
<b>Series 6, Subseries 1: Carnegie Ephemera, 1914-1930</b>		
Andrew Carnegie Visit to <i>Carnegie</i> 1914	25	1
Carnegie Institution Scope and Organization 1914		2
Harbor Ship Passes 1920-1921		3
Bauer Invite to Honor Capt. Ault		4
CIW Calendar 1922		5
Tentative Schedule <i>Carnegie</i> Cruise VII 1928		6
CIW 25 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration 1929		7
J.P. Ault Funeral Address 1929		8
J.P. Ault Condolences 1929-1930		9
Announcement of Carnegie Exhibit 1930		10
<b>Series 6, Subseries 2: Personal Ephemera, ca. 1905-1955</b>		
Student Newspaper c. 1905	25	11
Passes to New Zealand Jockey Clubs 1915		12
Dance Programs 1916		13
Meeting Minutes Child Study Club 1919		14
Menus 1916, 1920, n.d.		15
Poetry "Presidential Possibilities" + "U.S. Railroad Administration" ca. 1920		16
Chautauqua Program 1920		17
Receipts 1920-1921		18
J.P. Ault Election to American Physical Society 1923		19
Scribner's Magazine September 1927		20
Christmas List (?) 12/31/1927		21
"Should Adults Play Golf?" October 1929		22
The Dog Watch Magazine 1955		23
Pressed Flowers n.d.		24
Stamp Collection n.d.		25
Postcard Collection n.d.		26
Hymns n.d.		27
Evelyn Ault Art n.d.	26	1
Evelyn Ault Schoolwork n.d.		2
Mamie Ault Lecture Clippings and Announcements		3
Marjorie Ault Art n.d.		4
<b>Series 7: Clippings, 1914-1930</b>		
<i>Carnegie</i> Explosion, 1929-1930	27	1
Assorted <i>Carnegie</i> Articles, 1914-1929		2
Assorted Articles, ca. 1920s		3

**Subject Terms**

Topics: Carnegie (Ship)  
Scientific Expeditions  
Geophysics  
Geomagnetism

Occupation: Geophysicists

Corporate Names: Carnegie Institution of Washington. Dept. of Terrestrial  
Magnetism

Personal names: Ault, Mamie Totten

Forms: Photographs  
Correspondence  
Photograph albums

**Bibliography**

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Company, 1932.