

WILLIAM B. JOHNSON, 1895-1971
A Register of His Papers, 1917-1951

Overview of Collection

- Creator:** Johnson, William B. 1895-1971
- Collection Number:** Mss 254
- Title:** William B. Johnson Papers, 1917-1951, 1977
- Abstract:** William B. Johnson, career military man and Clemson alumnus, used expertise and knowledge gained while a cadet in Clemson College's school of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering to become an inventor and vehicle design team specialist while in the Army.
- Quantity:** 1.05 cubic feet consisting of 64 folders; 1 oversized folder containing 29 blueprints, certificates, drawings, and sketches; 27 photographs.

Scope and Content Note

The papers include correspondence, clippings, patents, drawings, sketches, photographs, and cyanotypes documenting the military career of William B. Johnson.

The papers date from 1917-1951 with one news-clipping from 1977. The correspondence files date from 1917-1942, the news-clippings from 1942-1977, and the patents from 1942-1951. The oversize blueprints, drawings, and sketches are from the 1940's. The cyanotypes date from 1911-1932. The photographs series has many undated photos, but the few that are dated appear to be from the early/mid-1940's.

The correspondence files are arranged chronologically, as are the news-clippings. The patents are arranged alphabetically; the contents within the folders are in chronological order. Although the original arrangement of the cyanotypes has not been disturbed, the photocopies have been numbered 1-80.

The correspondence files include orders sent from superior officers with various government departments to William B. Johnson while he was on active duty. These files reflect a general sense of everyday military life. The news-clippings focus on William B. Johnson's achievements and inventions. One file entitled "Legion of Merit" documents the occasion on which Johnson received this award.

The patents files include Johnson's inventions that benefited both the military and civilian sectors. Included are "Ambulance Steps," "Military Vehicle Bodies," "Vehicle Headlamp Units," "Rifle Brackets and Racks," "Toolboxes," and "Folding Bicycle Pedals," among many additional illustrations. These files also contain correspondences that document occasional deals with companies interested in William B. Johnson's patents. Of additional interest here is the

five-gallon gasoline container that Johnson invented. These are the familiar five-gallon cans that would be used by the military for many years. Included is a paper entitled “A History of Small Gasoline Containers In the U.S. Army” [c. early 1940’s-unknown author] which details the early problems that the military faced while trying to adequately supply its forces with fuel within theaters of conflict. William B. Johnson’s five-gallon gasoline cans were a welcome solution to the hardships of trying to keep supply lines moving at critical moments.

The cyanotype files depict photographs of various experimental/prototype vehicles that Johnson was involved in developing while stationed at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland.

The oversize folder contains blueprints, drawings, and hand-sketches of Johnson’s patents such as “Pintles,” “Folding Bicycle Pedal,” and the “Trailer Dolly.”

The photographs series depicts a sample of several locales, events, and Johnson himself. There are patents-related depictions, such as black and white photos of the “Gas Nozzle,” “Trailer Dolly,” and “Military Vehicle Bodies.” A few photographs illustrate Johnson while testing the now famous “Jeep” prototype, which he helped to design. In addition, several black and white photographs depict William B. Johnson receiving the “Legion of Merit” award in October 1945. Finally, there are eight black and white portraits of Johnson in uniform.

Although Johnson was a member of the design team that created the “Jeep,” there is nothing in the collection, aside from the clippings and photographs that document his role in that project.

Additional Collection Information

Cite as: [description of item such as Patent-“Container Vents”-- April 10, 1945], box number, folder number, Mss 254, William B. Johnson Papers, Special Collections, Clemson University Libraries, Clemson, SC.

Biographical Note

William B. Johnson was born on December 28, 1895 in Easley, SC, the son of Pinckney Camp and Lillie Mae Johnson. He was one of three children: Wayne and Winnie Johnson being his siblings. William B. Johnson attended Clemson College, where he majored in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. Upon graduation in 1917, he entered what would prove to be a productive military career.

Johnson’s long career began in Oglethorpe, Ga., where he trained at the 1st Officer Training School. In August 1917, Johnson received his commission as 2nd Lieutenant. Promotion to 1st Lieutenant came in February 1918, followed by a rise to captain in July 1918. Johnson then went on to serve with the Quartermaster Corps Ordnance Department and General Staff. He served four years during and after World War I in Europe, four years in Boston, Mass., fourteen years in Baltimore, Md., and four years in Washington, D.C. Johnson was commissioned a Major in 1936 and as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1940. In 1942 he was promoted to Colonel. Johnson received the Legion of Merit award in 1945.

After serving twenty-nine years, Johnson returned to Easley. While in retirement, he became involved in real estate, construction, and farm operation. Johnson served the local community for ten years as director of the Easley Chamber of Commerce. While there he served one year as President, and two years as Vice-President. In addition, Johnson served as President of the Dixie Farmers Cooperative Association for ten years. He died on March 16, 1971 and is buried in Easley, SC.

Collection Indexed Terms

This collection is indexed under the following terms in the University Libraries' online catalog. Researchers desiring materials about related topics, persons, or places should research the catalog under these headings.

Subjects:

Johnson, William B., 1895-1971
Containers
Military Engineering
United States. Army—Military Life
World War, 1914-1918

Document Types:

* All AAT
Clippings
Cyanotypes
Patents
Photographs
Sketches

Administrative Information

Acquired from:

Mrs. Sara Tollison in 1989.

Formerly accession number 89-193.

Processing Information:

The William B. Johnson Papers were processed by Carl Redd between 2003 and 2004.

Collection Separation List

Oversized Material

29 blueprints, certificates, drawings, and sketches

One 11.5" x 15" certificate recognizing William B. Johnson's appointment as 1st Lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps-march 14, 1921

Four (two copies) 8.5" x 14" bw drawings of "Containers"

Two 8.5" x 14" bw drawings of "Folding Bicycle Pedal" patent

Five 11.5" x 18" drawings of "Ten Gallon Water Cans" + "Filler Tube/Five Gallon Tank"

One untitled-sketch-nd
One sketch entitled “Pulling Spares and Duals”-September 21, 1944
One drawing-“Wheel-Low Pressure”-February 27, 1943
Two drawings (one copy)-“Resilient Wheel”-January 20, 1943
Two 8.5” x 14” drawings depicting the “Folding Bicycle Pedal”
One 11.5” x 17” drawing entitled “Flexible Nozzle Tubes”
One drawing entitled “Pintle Assembly (preliminary layout)-Roller Jaw Type”
One sketch-“Pintle”
One 8.5” x 14” bw drawing entitled “Pintles”
Two 8.5” x 14” bw drawings entitled “Trailer Dolly”
Two drawings-“Exhibit A; April 7, 1944 and “Trailer Dolly”
One blueprint entitled “Trailer Dolly”
Two bw photographs of William B. Johnson in dress uniform

Photographs

27 photographs in 3 folders

Folder	Photographs
1	1. 8” x 10” bw photograph of Johnson (middle) in “Jeep”-nd 2. 8” x 10” bw photograph of unknown building-nd 3. 8” x 10” bw photograph of unknown fuel storage location-nd 4. 8” x 10” bw photograph of Mack “NR” Transport-4-18-41
2	(1-4). 8” x 10” bw photographs of Johnson as he receives the “Legion of Merit” award-10-23-45 (5-12). 8” x 10” bw photographs depicting Johnson in his dress uniform
3	(1). 8” x 10” bw photograph of a “gas nozzle” (2-3). 8” x 10” bw photographs of a prototype “Jeep” being tested at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland (4-5). 8” x 10” bw photographs of the “Military Vehicle Body” (6-9). 8” x 10” bw photographs of the “Trailer Dolly”

Detailed Description

Box	Folder	Folder Title
1	1	1917-1918
	2	1919
	3	1920
	4	1921
	5	1922
	6	1923
	7	1924
	8	1925
	9	1926

10 1927
11 1928
12 1929
13 1930
14 1931
15 1932
16 1933
17 1934
18 1935
19 1936
20 1937
21 1938
22 1939
23 1940-1942

Subject Files

24 Legion of Merit -- October 23, 1945
25 Miscellaneous Photocopies of un-filed photographs --
nd
26 News-clippings -- 1942-1977
27 Receipts; Livezey Lumber Company

Patents

2 1 "Adapter Closure Assemblies"-- Sept. 21, 1943
2 "Ambulance Steps"-- July 20, 1943
3 "Folding Bicycle Pedals"
4 Cartier Inc. Agreement (patents include "A Portable
Container for Liquids," "Closure Cap," "Removable
Spout," "Container Vent," and "Container") -- Nov. 6,
1946-March 24, 1947
5 "A Closure Cap" (French Document)-- March 6, 1947
6 "Closure Cap Turning Means" and "Retaining Means for
Closure Caps"-- May 3, 1949
7 "Container" Drawings
8 Miscellaneous Correspondence Relating to "Containers"
9 "Container"-- October 23, 1945
10 "Container Mounting Bracket"-- January 6, 1942
11 "Container Pouring Spout"-- October 6, 1942
12 "Container Vents"-- April 10, 1945
13 "Portable Container for Liquids"-I -- Oct. 30, 1942
14 "Portable Container for Liquids"-II -- December, 21,
1943
15 "Cranes for Attachment to Motor Vehicles"-- July 14,
1942
16 Paper-"History of Small Gasoline Containers In the U.S.
Army"

17 Gasoline Closure Caps--“A Closure Cap”-- July 3, 1945
 and “Cap Retainers”-- June 29, 1943
 18 “Military Vehicle Bodies”-- July 20, 1943
 19 “Military Vehicle Headlamp Unit”-- March 24, 1942
 20 “Nozzles”-- March 6, 1945
 21 “Pintles”-- December 2, 1947
 22 “Rifle Bracket”-- December 23, 1941
 23 “Rifle Racks”-- June 30, 1942
 24 “Removable Spouts”-- July 28, 1942
 25 “Retractable Spouts”-- August 31, 1943
 26 Tool Box-Letters and Correspondence
 27 “Toolbox”-- January 26, 1943
 28 “Toolboxes”-- February 23, 1943
 29 “Tow Bars”-- December 29, 1942
 30 “Traction Devices”-- June 23, 1942
 31 Trailer Dolly-Research Notes and Drawings
 32 “Trailer Dollies”-- November 25, 1947
 33 “Retractable Auxiliary Trailer Wheel Mountings”--
 September 22, 1942
 34 “Transplanting Digger”-- April 17, 1951

3

1 “Cyanotypes”-- Aberdeen Proving Grounds-
 Prototypes/Experimental Vehicles-I (1-35)
 2 “Cyanotypes”-- Aberdeen Proving Grounds-
 Prototypes/Experimental Vehicles-II (36-80)
 3 “Cyanotypes”-- Aberdeen Proving Grounds-Prototypes/
 Experimental Vehicles-Original Material