

Christopher Miner Spencer Collection

Finding Aid

Windsor Historical Society
96 Palisado Avenue, Windsor, CT 06095

Creator: Christopher Miner Spencer, Vesta Spencer Taylor, and others

Dates: 1834, 1854 --1918, 1953

Extent: 1 linear foot (2 DC)

Accession #: 1922.4, 1953.12, 1991.1

Biographical Note

Christopher Miner Spencer was born in Manchester, CT on June 20, 1833. He was recognized as an inventive genius, conceiving and patenting more efficient metal products and machinery in the formative early years of American manufacturing. He acquired a total of 42 patents in his lifetime, as well as building a steam-powered buggy in 1862 and taking up aviation only a few years before his death. He lived in Windsor, CT for many years with his wife Georgette Taylor Spencer, sons Percival H., Roger M., and daughter Vesta (Mrs. Charles Taylor). He died January 14, 1922 in Windsor, CT.

At age 14, he apprenticed at the Cheney Brothers' silk manufacturing company in Manchester, CT and gained skill as a machinist. He worked in a variety of machinery shops as a young man, and began to develop experimental and innovative machinery in his spare time. He received his first patent for an automatic silk-winding machine, and in 1860 another for his concept of a breech-loading repeating firearm. The Spencer Repeating Rifle Company was incorporated in 1862 in order to produce the firearm for the Union Army's use during the Civil War. The rifle and its cartridges were superior to the traditional muzzle-loading firearms.

Spencer had a succession of inventions that he patented and joined with others to manufacture. After a few years he would remove himself from the production efforts in order to focus on developing new ideas. He and Charles Ethan Billings opened a forge shop in Hartford, CT to manufacture sewing machine shuttles, pistol frames, and hand tools. In 1872 this was reorganized as the Billings & Spencer Company. Spencer conceived the first automatic screw machine in 1873, and subsequently founded the Hartford Machine Screw Company in Hartford, CT. In 1883 the Spencer Arms Company was incorporated to produce slide-action repeating shotguns. The company manufactured rifles and shotguns in Windsor, CT until it was sold and removed to New York in 1890. The Spencer Automatic Machine Screw Company was organized in Windsor in 1893 to produce screws from coils of wire.

Spencer can be credited with innovative developments in the design and manufacture of silk-spooling machines, turret lathes, drop forgings, automatic screw machines, repeating rifles and shotguns. His diverse and wide-ranging interests contributed substantially to the growth and development of automation in American manufacturing.

Scope and Contents

This composite collection contains both primary and secondary resource materials by and about Christopher M. Spencer and the Spencer family. Items directly associated with C.M. Spencer include patent and business documents, domestic accounts and receipts, correspondence, land deeds, personal memoirs, photographs and artifacts. Newspaper and magazine articles describe Spencer's career, his inventions, and in particular his development of the repeating rifle and the automatic screw machine.

Other Spencer family materials include typescript transcriptions of correspondence by his wife Georgette Taylor Rogers about nursing school in Hartford, CT (1879-1880), by his father-in-law George Washington Rogers, Captain of the steamship *Peytona*, to his wife Frances Linnell Taylor Rogers from Valparaiso [Chile?] (1854-1867), and letters by his daughter Vesta Taylor Spencer from Europe (1953).

Arrangement

Series I. Primary materials, Christopher M. Spencer

Subseries A. Personal documents

Subseries B. Professional career – drop forge

Subseries C. Professional career – firearms

Subseries D. Professional career – screw machines, steam boiler

Series II. Primary materials, Spencer family

Series III. Secondary materials, Christopher M. Spencer career

Subseries A. Spencer rifles

Subseries B. Screw machines

Subseries C. Biographical

Series IV. Artifacts

Box and Folder Lists

Series I. Primary materials, Christopher M. Spencer

Subseries A. Personal documents

1.1 Quit claim and warranty deeds for property owned by C.M. and G.T. Spencer, 1877-1914

1.2 Correspondence to and from C.M. Spencer, 1866-1919; speeches, including 1912 account of meeting Pres. Lincoln in 1863; tribute to Frank Cheney, 1904

1.3 Certificates, 1885-1912; honorary 85th birthday luncheon program, 1918

1.4 Receipts for C.M. domestic accounts, 1900-1908, Windsor, CT area proprietors

- 1.5 Photographs of C.M. Spencer, home, rifles, screw machines, oil portrait, horseless carriage, c1860's – 1918

Subseries B. Professional career – drop forge

- 1.6 Billings & Spencer Company history, image

Subseries C. Professional career – firearms

- 1.7 Patents, agreements, legal documents, 1861-1917
- 1.8 Documents, advertising/sales brochures, stock certificates, 1870-1893 Roper Sporting Arms Co., Spencer Arms Co., Spencer Repeating Arms Co., Spencer Magazine Shot-Gun Co.
- 1.9 *Advance of Rosecrans' Army on Chattanooga: Wilder's Brigade Leading* by John T. Wilder. Chattanooga: Press of Thompson Ptg. Co., n.d.; inscribed on inside cover to C.M. Spencer from the author

Subseries D. Professional career – screw machines, steam boiler

- 1.10 Patents, legal documents, drawings, 1873-1916
Spencer Machine Screw Company

Series II. Primary materials, Spencer family

- 1.11 Memoirs of C.M. Spencer by Vesta Spencer Taylor and others
- 1.12 Correspondence, 1834, 1854-1867 G.W. Rogers to F.L.T. Rogers from San Francisco and Valparaiso [see Roy Marcot Collection for additional letters]
- 1.13 Correspondence, 1879-1880 Georgette Taylor Rogers
- 1.14 Correspondence, 1953 Vesta Spencer Taylor
- 1.15 Lineage, documents pertaining to C.M. Spencer's wives Theodora F. Spencer and Georgette T. R. Spencer

Series III. Secondary materials, Christopher M. Spencer career

Subseries A. Spencer rifles

- 2.1 Articles -- repeating rifles
- 2.2 Articles -- cartridges
- 2.3 Articles -- President Lincoln
- 2.4 *The Gun Report* (3 issues, February, March, April 1978)
- 2.5 Articles – Justin O. Buckeridge

Subseries B. Screw machines

- 2.6 Articles – screw machines, Billings & Spencer Co.
- 2.7 Pamphlets – screw machines, Perry-Fay Co., Hartford Machine Screw Co., Standard Screw Co., New Britain Machine Co.

Subseries C. Biographical

- 2.8 Articles; *Dedication of the Memorials to Hartford Industrialists at the State Trade School Hartford Connecticut, 1931*

Series IV. Artifacts

2.9 Plaque, ID button, lead bullet, screws, nut

Custodial History

Traditionally the Society had intermingled materials and donations into extensive subject files. Christopher Miner Spencer materials from Roy Marcot and other sources had been combined with similar items received from the Spencer family. The origin of some of the items is now difficult to distinguish. By referring to the Society's accession records, materials were divided according to their provenance at the time of the preparation of this finding aid. Documents, photographs, and artifacts were donated at several times by the Spencer family. Mr. Marcot acquired some of his documents and family correspondence from C.M. Spencer's son, Percival H. Spencer. Items whose source is uncertain remain with the Spencer Collection or in the library subject file.

Related Materials

- Roy M. Marcot Collection
- Subject files:
 - Spencer, Christopher Miner
 - Spencer, Percival Hopkins
 - Businesses – Manufacturing – Spencer Machine & Screw
- Account book for Spencer Arms Company, 1884-1886 (1953.12.1)
- Portrait/painting of Christopher Miner Spencer by Norma Sloper (1972.9.2)
- Spencer Repeating Rifle (1972.9.3)

Subject Terms

Spencer, Christopher Miner, 1833-1922
Spencer, Georgette Taylor Rogers, 1859-1906
Spencer, Percival Hopkins, 1897-1995
Rogers, George Washington, 1818-1870
Taylor, Vesta Spencer, 1884-1971
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865
Billings, Charles Ethan, 1834-
Cheney, Frank, 1817-1904
Wilder, John Thomas, 1830-1917
Billings & Spencer Company (Hartford, Conn.)
Roper Sporting Arms Co. (Hartford, Conn.)
Spencer Arms Company (Windsor, Conn.)
Spencer rifle
Rifles
Screw machines, Automatic
Peytona (Steamship)
Letterheads – Connecticut -- Windsor

Administrative History

Collection reorganized and finding aid revised by Barbara Goodwin, August 2005.