

Finding aid for the Ralph B. Baldwin papers Collection 176

Finding aid prepared by Sam Arnold

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
March 1995
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Summary Information

Repository	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Creator	Baldwin, Ralph Belknap, 1912-2010
Title	Ralph B. Baldwin Papers
Date [inclusive]	circa 1850-1993
Extent	2.2 Linear feet Three boxes
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Ralph Belknap Baldwin (1912-2010) was a planetary scientist and Grand Rapids industrialist. He is known for his work on lunar craters and also helped developed the radio proximity fuze during World War II. The collection includes photographs, newspaper clippings and papers pertaining to his life, career and family. It includes a reflective and factual autobiography and is particularly rich in its data on Baldwin's work in astrophysics. Also included is information on the genealogy of the Baldwin, Belknap and Osband famlies.</p>

Biographical/Historical note

Ralph Belknap Baldwin was born in Grand Rapids June 6, 1912 to Julie Belknap (a descendant of Captain Charles E. Belknap) and Melvin D. Baldwin. Ralph graduated from Central High School in 1930 and earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Michigan (B.S, 1934; M.S., 1935; Ph.D. 1937; and LL.D., 1975).

With his specialization in astrophysics, from 1935 through 1942 he taught astronomy successively at the University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, and Northwestern University. After marrying Lois Virginia Johnston on August 3, 1940 (children: M. Dana II, Pamela and Bruce), Baldwin was asked to join the Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) in 1942 as a senior physicist, where he was assigned the task of developing the proximity fuse, a weapon that proved instrumental during the last months of World War II. The importance of the fuse is described in his 1980 book, *The Deadly Fuse: The Secret Weapon of World War II*. Baldwin also wrote several books dealing with astrophysics: *The Face of the Moon* in 1949, *The Measure of the Moon* in 1963 and *The Moon: A Fundamental Survey* in 1965.

In addition to his career in science, Baldwin began working for the family-owned Oliver Machinery Company in Grand Rapids in 1947 as production manager. After a series of other jobs with the firm, he was made president in 1970 and chairman of the board in 1982. He retired in 1984 and is currently spending winters in Naples, Florida and summers in Grand, Rapids Michigan.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department March 1995

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Ralph B. Baldwin, accession numbers 1993.028, 1994.013, 1998.074, 2003.053, 2004.052

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Collection 275, includes documents related to Lois Johnston Baldwin, President of the Ladies Literary Club in 1960/61 and 1961/62.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Oliver Machinery Co.

Family Name(s)

- Baldwin
- Belknap
- Osband

Genre(s)

- personal papers

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

Personal Name(s)

- Baldwin, Ralph Belknap, 1912-2010

Subject(s)

- Moon -- Surface
- Proximity fuzes -- History

- World War, 1939-1945

Series I. Autobiography, 1993-

Collection Inventory

Series I. Autobiography, 1993-

Scope and Contents note

The first box contains the Baldwin's updated autobiography, "Highlighted Story of a Long and Unusual Life." The material is divided in chapters, whose titles provide descriptions of each folder's contents. Box 1 also contains a collection of correspondences, both outgoing and incoming, dealing with a wide range of topics such as: donation of the collection to the Grand Rapids Public Library, the American Geophysical Union, Oliver Machinery Company, Aquinas College, etc. These items were provided by Baldwin to detail his various memberships and affiliations. Finally, the first box contains an interview of Baldwin conducted by Ronald E. Doel in 1989. The content of the conversation is similar to that of the autobiography, viz. family, life, science, and career.

	Box	Folder
Title page	1	1
Photo of Baldwin	1	1
Table of Contents	1	1
Preface	1	1
Chp. 1: "Younger Days"	1	1
Chp. 2: "In School"	1	1

Series I. Autobiography, 1993-

Chp. 3: "Pennsylvania and Northwestern"	1	1
Chp. 4: "Early Days at the Applied Physics Laboratory"	1	1
Chp. 5: "Anti-Personnel Fuzes"	1	1
Chp. 6: "Some Tests"	1	1
Chp. 7: "Battle Use"	1	1
Chp. 8: "Early Astronomy"	1	1
Chp. 9: "To Oliver Machinery Company"	1	2
Chp. 10: "The Face of the Moon"	1	2
Chp. 11: "Harold Urey"	1	2
Chp. 12: "The Measure of the Moon"	1	2
Chp. 13: "Early Honors"	1	2
Chp. 14: "Later Astronomical Work and Product Liability"	1	2
Chp. 15: "To President Gerald R. Ford"	1	3
Chp. 16: "Product Liability"	1	3

Series I. Autobiography, 1993-

Chp. 17: "In Chapter 11"	1	3
Chp. 18: "Later Honors"	1	3
Chp. 19: "The 1980's"	1	3
Chp. 20: "Introduction for Course given at Aquinas College"	1	3
Chp. 21: "It Could Happen Here"	1	3
Chp. 22: "Astronomy and Civilization"	1	4
Chp. 23: "A Scientist's View of Creation"	1	4
Chp. 24: "Science and Philosophy"	1	4
Chp. 25: "Religion"	1	4
Chp. 26: "Politics"	1	4
Chp. 27: "Reactions of Others"	1	4
Chp. 28: "To a Rocky Moon"	1	4
Chp. 29: "Belknap Genealogy"	1	5
Chp. 30: "Baldwin Genealogy"	1	5

Series II. Photographs

Chp. 31: "Biographical Information and CV"	1	5
Revisions to Chp. 25	1	6
Correspondence, 1992-3.	1	7-8
Interview by Ronald E. Doel, 1989.	1	9

Series II. Photographs**Scope and Contents note**

The second box contains photographs and personal papers. There are portraits of several family members, influential characters, and Ralph B. Belknap's collection of Chinese snuff bottles.

19th Century images

	Box	Folder
Hebert P. Belknap? (Damaged print)	2	1
Julia Graves Belknap (1864-1894)	2	1
Mary Ann Belknap	2	1
Lucretia Barlett Hoskins (2 photos)	2	1
Dr. Thomas Hoskins (2 photos)	2	1

20th Century images

Melvin D. Osband	2	1
20th Century images		
	Box	Folder
Frank A. Baldwin	2	1
Julia Belknap Baldwin	2	1
Melvin D. Baldwin (2 photos, one is a Robinson Studio photo)	2	1
Pamela Baldwin, ca. 1970	2	1
Ralph Belknap Baldwin	2	1
Ralph Baldwin. 1930s Central High School Graduation Announcement with his photo. (Moved from 176-2-7, 7/3/2008)	2	1
Capt. Charles Belknap	2	1
Group Images		
	Box	Folder
Ford, Gerald R. (3 photos)	2	2
R.B. Baldwin in Pulpit	2	2

Series III. Personal Papers

Julia and Frank Baldwin with friends.	2	2
Children of Thomas Osborn: Wilson, Weaver, Eliza, Thomas, James M., Joseph, Melvin Durfee Osband	2	2
	Box	Folder
Chinese Snuff Bottles	2	3
Series III. Personal Papers		
Scope and Contents note		
<p>Also contains personal information in the categories of childhood, education, and family. The childhood folder contains a letter from Ralph to his mother at age 10 (1921) and a poem written to him from his parents. The education folder contains papers related to Baldwin's early (Central High School, 1930) and later education as well as a piano recital program, and an Apollo launch invitation (1972). The family folder contains a retrospective by M.D. Baldwin, several genealogies, and explanations. The biographical information folder contains a complete resume, including a list of articles and publications by Baldwin.</p> <p>News clippings deal with a wide variety of topics: honors and recognition, family, science and business. Both clipping folders contain articles about the Moon and other astronomical research, and Ralph Baldwin's significance in that field.</p>		
	Box	Folder
Newspaper clippings, 1946-1980.	2	4-5
Personal Papers, Childhood, 1921, n.d.	2	6
Personal Papers, Education, 1930-1972.	2	7

Series III. Personal Papers

Personal Papers, Family, n.d. (Reveries of an Old Timer M.D. Baldwin genealogies)	2	8
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Biographical Information, 1992.	2	9
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Box

Unprocessed material		3
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