

Delaware River Port Authority records on the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge

Ms. Coll.1043

Finding aid prepared by Molly Hutt.

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University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2015 January 21

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Delaware River Port Authority
Title	Delaware River Port Authority records on the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge
Call number	Ms. Coll.1043
Date [inclusive]	1954-1965
Extent	1 linear feet (1 box)
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Walt Whitman Bridge is a single-level, seven-lane suspension bridge reaching across the Delaware River from Philadelphia to Gloucester City in Camden County, New Jersey. Construction on the bridge began in 1953, and the bridge was opened to traffic in May 1967. The naming of the bridge was highly controversial and the Delaware River Port Authority's records document the support and criticism of selecting Walt Whitman as the person for whom the bridge was named. The bulk of the collection consists of letters to the Delaware River Port Authority from concerned New Jersey and Philadelphia area citizens, but researchers will also find Delaware River Port Authority meeting records, clippings, and an essay related to the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge.</p>

Cite as:

Delaware River Port Authority records on the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge, Ms. Coll 1043, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

The Delaware River Port Authority was founded on July 17, 1951 as a successor to the Delaware River Joint Bridge Commission. On the same day, President Truman signed a bill to permit the building of a second crossing of the Delaware River, which is now known as the Walt Whitman Bridge (the first being the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, completed in 1926 under the name Delaware River Bridge). The Walt Whitman Bridge is a single-level, seven-lane suspension bridge reaching across the Delaware River from Philadelphia to Gloucester City in Camden County, New Jersey. Construction on the bridge began in 1953, and the bridge was opened to traffic in May 1957. It is now one of five expressway-standard bridges connecting the Philadelphia area with the southern part of New Jersey.

The naming of the bridge, as evidenced by this collection, was highly controversial. The bridge was meant to be named after a person of note who had lived in New Jersey, but some area citizens opposed the name "Walt Whitman Bridge" for a variety of reasons. Walt Whitman (1819-1892), the famous American humanist poet, essayist, and journalist has been called America's first "poet of democracy" and is best known for his work *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's writing has sometimes been the subject of controversy, often due to his overt depictions of homosexuality and bisexuality. Many objecting to the choice of his name for the bridge saw Whitman's work as sympathizing with communist ideals and criticized him for his egalitarian view of humanity.

Scope and Contents

The bulk of the Delaware River Port Authority records on the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge is composed of correspondence from New Jersey and Philadelphia area citizens expressing their support for or opposition to the name "Walt Whitman Bridge" for the bridge connecting Philadelphia to Gloucester City, New Jersey. This correspondence comprises Series I, which includes letters from supporters, letters from opposition without alternate suggestions, letters from opposition with alternate suggestions, and other correspondence. It should be noted that box 1 folders 7-13 contain identical or almost-identical copies of a single form letter written in opposition to the name "Walt Whitman Bridge" differing only in annotation (folder 7) or simply identical but for the distinct signatures at the bottom (folders 8-13). Series II includes reports, minutes, meeting summaries, and other records from the Delaware River Port Authority pertaining to the naming of the bridge. The most substantial portion of this material is made up of copies of a "Summary for Special Committee on Bridge Names" written in June 1955 and pertaining to both the Benjamin Franklin Bridge and the Walt Whitman Bridge. As per its introduction, the summary is

divided into the following parts: I. Actions of the Delaware River Port Authority, II. Suggestions from the public at large, and III. Staff evaluations.

The third series contains a small collection of clippings on topics pertaining to the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge that primarily concern religious issues with Walt Whitman's lifestyle. It also includes an essay by Janice Rowan, a New Jersey student, which covers the naming of the bridge as well as the contents of the present collection.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2015 January 21

Finding aid prepared by Molly Hutt.

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

Use Restrictions

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Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Correspondence
- Essays

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- New Jersey--History
- Philadelphia (Pa.)--History

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892

SUBJECT(S)

- Bridges -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia
- Bridges--New Jersey--Gloucester City
- Poets, American--19th century
- Public opinion

Collection Inventory

SERIES I. CORRESPONDENCE.

	Box	Folder
Letters from supporters, with copies of responses from DRPA secretary, 1955 November 24-1956 March 2, undated.	1	1-6
Letters from opposition without alternative suggestions: form letters to Delaware River Port Authority (identical copies with individual signatures and some annotations), 1956 January.	1	7-13
Letters from opposition without alternative suggestions: individual letters to Delaware River Port Authority, with copies of responses from DRPA secretary, 1955 December 5-1956 February 23, undated.	1	14
Letters from opposition with alternative suggestions: Geographical, 1955 August 8-1966 March 5, undated.	1	15
Letters from opposition with alternative suggestions: "Joyce Kilmer", 1955 December 5-1956 March 5.	1	16
Letters from opposition with alternative suggestions: Presidents, 1955 July 25-1956 February 10, undated.	1	17
Letters from opposition with alternative suggestions: Multiple suggestions, other, 1955 November 2-1956 April 17, undated.	1	18
Correspondence related to the naming of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, 1954 April 29-1956 February 17.	1	19
Self-addressed envelopes (sampling), 1956.	1	20

Letters, unsolicited, regarding the naming of the Walt Whitman Bridge and letters from the Delaware River Port Authority informing interested parties of the final decision for the bridges' names, 1954 April 6-1956 March 6.	1	21
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SERIES II. RECORDS, 1954 NOVEMBER 17-1956 JANUARY 27, UNDATED.

	Box	Folder
Special Committee on Bridge Names reports and minutes, 1955 July 13.	1	22
"Summary for Special Committee on Bridge Names," 1 of 2 (contains one original and one photocopy with annotations and inserted clippings), June 1955.	1	23
"Summary for Special Committee on Bridge Names," 2 of 2 (contains two photocopies without notes), June 1955.	1	24
Other Delaware River Port Authority records, 1954-1956.	1	25

SERIES III. NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS, CHURCH BULLETIN, AND ESSAY.

	Box	Folder
Newspaper clippings and First Unitarian Church weekly bulletin, 1956 January.	1	26
"Walt Whitman and the Battle of the Bridge" by Janice Rowan, 1964 December 19.	1	27