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# Guide to the John Brownson Watkins Papers 1895-1919



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## Descriptive Summary

<b>Identifier</b>	ICU.SPCL.JBWATKINS
<b>Title</b>	Watkins, John Brownson. Papers
<b>Date</b>	1895-1919
<b>Size</b>	2 linear feet (2 boxes)
<b>Repository</b>	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
<b>Abstract</b>	John B. Watkins was an alumnus of the University of Chicago. He drove an ambulance for several years in France during WWI. The collection contains his letters home during that time, as well as news clippings and a few items of personal ephemera.

## Information on Use

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Watkins, John Brownson. Papers [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

### Biographical Note

John Brownson Watkins was born June 20, 1899 in Kankakee, IL. He entered the University of Chicago in 1916 but left to be a volunteer ambulance driver in France in 1917. When American troops arrived in Europe, Watkins joined the Army. Between 1917 and 1919, he wrote letters to his parents in Kankakee, IL, as well as to other family members. Some of the letters were excerpted for local papers, and were written with this in mind.

Upon returning to the States, Watkins completed his bachelor's degree in political economy in 1921. He went on to receive both a Master's degree (in 1924) and PhD (in 1929) from the University of Chicago's School of Commerce and Administration. His thesis dealt with transportation issues, and his expertise in this area provided cover in future military intelligence work.

After WWI, Watkins stayed in the reserves. He became active again in 1940, where he carried out various intelligence operations and participated in the de-Nazification of German rocket scientists in Belgium. He was re-activated during the Korean War and became one of the founders of the CIA's Strategic Intelligence Research unit. Watkins retired from the army in 1959 at the rank of Colonel.

In addition to his military career, Watkins worked for Illinois energy company Commonwealth Edison, conducted research at Northwestern University, and taught at Roosevelt University. He retired from teaching at age 70.

Watkins was married in 1923 to Mildred W. Miller; they had a son, John M. Watkins, and a daughter, Jean Watkins Thornburg. Watkins died on November 18, 1974.

### **Scope Note**

The collection is divided into two series. Series I, Papers, consists mainly of correspondence from Watkins to his parents, though there are also letters to other relatives. Of particular interest is a letter describing a victory parade in Paris at the end of the war. There are a few newspaper clippings, one which contains excerpts from Watkins' letters. There are also a few letters to Watkins' mother from a French woman who received assistance from the Kankakee Women's Committee. There are a few pieces of family ephemera at the end of the series. Series II, Oversize, contains a small flag. The bulk of the material dates from 1917 to 1919.

### **Related Resources**

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

Watkins, John Brownson

University of Chicago. Office of the Registrar. World War I Service. Records, 1917-1919

University of Chicago. World War I Ephemera. Collection, 1917-1922

### **Subject Headings**

- Watkins, John Brownson
- University of Chicago
- World War, 1914-1918 -- Correspondence
- World War, 1914-1918 -- France

### **INVENTORY**

#### **Series I: Papers**

This series contains correspondence, news clippings, and ephemera.

**Box 1**

**Folder 1**

Correspondence – Letter Home, March, 1915

**Box 1**

**Folder 2**

Correspondence – Letters Home, February-March, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 3**

Correspondence – Letters Home, April, and Clipping, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 4**

Correspondence – Letters Home, May, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 5**

Correspondence – Letters Home, June, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 6**

Clippings – Sir Douglas Haig's Despatch, June 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 7**

Correspondence – Letters Home, July, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 8**

Correspondence – Letters Home, August, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 9**

Correspondence – Letters Home, September, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 10**

Correspondence – Letters Home, October, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 11**

Correspondence – Letters Home, November, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 12**

Correspondence – Letters Home, December, 1917

**Box 1**

**Folder 13**

Correspondence – Letters Home, January, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 14**

Correspondence – Letters Home, February, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 15**

Correspondence – Letters Home, March-April, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 16**

Correspondence – Letters Home, May-June, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 17**

Correspondence – Letters Home, July, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 18**

Correspondence – Letters Home, August, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 19**

Correspondence – Letters Home, September-October, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 20**

Correspondence – Letters Home, November, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 21**

Correspondence – Letters Home, December, 1918

**Box 1**

**Folder 22**

Correspondence – Letters Home, January-February, 1919

**Box 1**

**Folder 23**

Correspondence – Letters Home, March, 1919

**Box 1**

**Folder 24**

Correspondence – Letters Home, April-May, 1919

**Box 1**

**Folder 25**

Correspondence – Letters Home, June, 1919

**Box 1**

**Folder 26**

Correspondence – Letters Home, July, 1919

**Box 1**

**Folder 27**

Correspondence – L. Charon to N. Watkins, 1918, undated

**Box 1**

**Folder 28**

Ambulance Field Service Newsletter, circa 1916

**Box 1**

**Folder 29**

Commencement Program, Postcard, 1895, 1905

**Series II: Oversize**

This series contains oversize material consisting of a flag that was hung in Watkins' parents' window while he was in France.

**Box 2**

Flag, circa 1917