

Papers of Frank Ross Chambers, 1866-1964

A Finding Aid to the Collection in
the Bronxville History Center, Village of Bronxville,
at the Bronxville Public Library

Prepared by Raymond H. Geselbracht
Bronxville, New York
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Administrative Information

Title: Papers of Frank Ross Chambers

Dates: 1866-1964

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Biographical Sketch—Frank Ross Chambers

When Frank Ross Chambers died on April 30, 1940, his obituary in the *Bronxville Review Press* called him the “first citizen of Bronxville,” using a phrase that was often heard around Bronxville to describe an extraordinary man. Chambers lived in Bronxville for fifty-two years, from 1888 until his death. He played a leading role in incorporating the Village of Bronxville in 1898, and for the next thirty years he served—and shaped—the village in many ways. In village government, he was at different times village clerk, street commissioner, and president; he served on the Bronxville board of education, the Bronxville Library board of trustees, and on Lawrence Hospital's board of governors. He was for many years a deacon and elder and member of the consistory at Bronxville Reformed Church, and he was superintendent of the church's Sunday school.

He also gave the Village of Bronxville many gifts, including half the cost of acquiring land for and building a magnificent Village Hall and part of the cost of building a new village school building. He wanted the village to have a large park on land near his house, and he accumulated sizable holdings of land for the purpose, but eventually most of this land was occupied by Bronxville School. He made other donations of land to the village as well, including the parcels which became home to the public library and a new village hall. The outcome of Chambers' donations of land, and

of his dedication to education and public service, was the creation of Bronxville's civic center at the intersection of Pondfield and Midland Roads.

Frank Ross Chambers during his long life saw Bronxville transformed from a rural hamlet into a suburban village. "When we came to Bronxville in 1888," he wrote when he was an old man, "there were less than 300 people living within present Village limits. Now there are 7,000." The village which Chambers left behind at his death in 1940 was in significant measure his creation and his gift to Bronxville's residents and visitors.

- 1850, Sept. 3 Born, Mobile, Alabama, the youngest of five children, all boys
- 1857 Following the death of his mother, sent to live with his father's sister, Margaret Chambers Stout (Aunt Peggy), in Coosa County, Alabama, north of Montgomery. Became close to his cousin, Kate Waller.
- c. 1860-1861 Attended private schools
- c. 1862-1864 Messenger boy and letter copyist at the Confederate arsenal at Montgomery, Alabama. Often visited his cousin Margaret Stout Waller and her daughter Kate, in Montgomery.
- 1861-1865 Death of his father, 1861 or 1862, and death of three of his four brothers—Walter, Hugh, and George—in the Civil War. His brother Charles was seriously wounded at the Battle of Sharpsburg (1863), but survived.
- c. 1864-1866 Worked for the Pioneer Express Company, Planters Bank of Alabama, and, again, the Pioneer Express Company
- 1866 Assistant bookkeeper at the wholesale dry goods firm of D. Browder & Co.
- 1867-1871 Bookkeeper, credit man, and office manager, Evans, Gardner & Co., New York City
- 1871-1874 Employed with M. N. Rogers & Company, a clothing firm
- 1872, Apr. 27 Married Mollie Pease
- 1874-1925 Partner in combined firm of Rogers, Peet & Co. beginning in November 1874. President of incorporated firm from 1912. Retired from daily work in 1916, but briefly returned as president following the deaths of two of his successors in 1924 and 1925.
- 1874 Birth of Frank Ross Chambers, Jr. (died 1925)
- 1875 Birth of Mary Elizabeth Chambers (died 1950)
- 1876 Birth of Alice Chambers (died May 1877)

1878	Moved into a house on Second Avenue in Mount Vernon
1882	Death of Mollie Chambers
1883	Invited his cousin Margaret Waller and her daughter Kate to move from Montgomery to Mount Vernon to live with him and help him care for his children. (Made the move possible by paying for the institutionalization of an disabled relative who had been in Margaret and Kate Waller's care.)
1884	Married Kate Waller
1885	Birth of William Waller Chambers (died 1897)
1888	Moved to Bronxville, to a house called Crow's Nest
1889	Birth of Margaret Chambers (died 1980)
1896-1897	Rebuilding of Crow's Nest. The Chambers family took a long European trip, then rented a house in Lawrence Park
c. 1897	Joined the Reformed Church of Bronxville; served for many years as elder and deacon, as a member of the consistory, and as superintendent of the Sunday school
1900-1902	President (Mayor) of Bronxville
1906-1927	Served on the Bronxville Public Library board of trustees
1909-1927	Served on Lawrence Hospital's board of governors
1910-1927	Served on the Bronxville board of education
1940	Died, Bronxville

Collection Description

The Bronxville History Center's collection of papers of Frank Ross Chambers consists of correspondence, photographs, an autobiographical manuscript, a speech draft, biographical sketches, a passport, and printed material relating primarily to the lives of Frank Ross Chambers and Kate Waller Chambers, and to their house in Bronxville, called "Crow's Nest." Also included is an essay about the Nondescript Club's first decade, 1895-1905, written by Margaret Chambers Warshuis. The correspondence includes eleven letters from Frank Ross Chambers to Kate Waller Chambers, 1869-1888, 1924, and undated, and five letters from Kate Waller Chambers to Frank Ross Chambers, 1866 (or 1867), 1883, and undated; the autobiographical manuscript is by Frank Ross Chambers and covers his life from childhood to the time he married Kate Waller, in 1884.

Most of the documents in the Bronxville History Center's collection of Papers of Frank Ross Chambers are copied from the original documents in the New-York Historical Society's collection of Frank Ross Papers. The Society's collection contains, in addition to the documents copied for the Bronxville History Center, a sizable collection of letters, 1860s-1880s, to Chambers from members of his family, including his four brothers, three of whom were killed in the Civil War; several letters, 1960s, from Chambers to one of his brothers; several letters, 1850s, among family members other than Chambers; a few letters, 1905-1907, to Kate Waller Chambers from her mother; three essays about Bronxville written for the Nondescript Club by Hester Meigs Whitehouse; copies of *News All Around*, a newspaper written from July to September, 1960, by a young person living in Lawrence Park; a sizeable collection of obituaries and other memorial materials from the time of Chambers' death; and many photographs not copied for the History Center collection.

Folder Title List

Subject File, 1866-1964

Box 1

- Correspondence, 1869-1964 (copied from N-YHS)
- Frank Ross Chambers—Autobiographical Manuscript, January 1934 (copied from N-YHS)
- Frank Ross Chambers—Biographical Sketches (copied from N-YHS)
- Frank Ross Chambers—Passport (1921) and City of Edinburgh Certificate of Registration (copied from N-YHS)
- Letters—Frank Ross Chambers to Kate Waller Chambers, 1869-1888, 1924, and Undated (copied from the N-YHS)
- Letters—Kate Waller Chambers to Frank Ross Chambers, 1866 (or 1867), 1883, and Undated (copied from the N-YHS)
- Letters—Frank Ross Chambers and Kate Waller Chambers, 1900-1937 (Bronxville History Center)
- Kate Waller Chambers—Writings, 1923 (copied from the N-YHS)
- Kate Waller Chambers—Writings, 1924, 1932, and Undated (Bronxville History Center)
- Margaret Chambers Warnshuis—"The Nondescript Club and the Village of Bronxville, 1895-1905" (copied from the N-YHS)

- Speech Draft, Memories of Kate Waller Chambers and Margaret Chambers Warnshuis, by Hester Meigs Lytle, Given at a Meeting of the Nondescript Club, October 15, 1985 (Bronxville History Center)
- Crow's Nest Sales Brochure, 1947 (Bronxville History Center)
- Crow's Nest—Photograph Album, 1906 (Bronxville History Center)
- Photographs of Frank Ross Chambers, Kate Waller Chambers, and Crow's Nest (copied from the NY-HS)
- Crow's Nest--Stationery