

Finding Aid to the Sharkey Collection

Descriptive Summary

Title: Sharkey Collection

Date Range: 1865–1990s

Collection number: [Accession #11-36, 10-26](#)

Extent: 31 boxes, 18 cubic feet

Repository: County History Center, Contra Costa County Historical Society, 724 Escobar Street, Martinez, CA 94553, 925-229-1042

Physical location: Newspaper Room

Legal status: public

Information for Researchers

Access: Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights: [Contact the Contra Costa County Historical Society for publication permission.](#)

Preferred Citation: Suggested citation of these records is: [Identification of item] Sharkey Family Collection, Contra Costa County Historical Society.

Scope and Content: The Sharkey Collection is an extensive collection of personal correspondence, political and legal documents, newspapers, and ephemera concerning State Senator William R. Sharkey and family, including his son William Sharkey Jr. and grandson William Sharkey III, their spouses, in-laws and other relatives. The collection ranges from 1865 to the 1990s. After publishing newspapers in Plumas County and then the *Contra Costa Gazette* in Martinez, Sharkey Sr. was elected to the California State Senate serving the 9th district in 1916, and was appointed chairman of the California Rivers and Harbors Commission by Governor Hiram Johnson. He continued to run his growing newspaper business while he served in politics. When Sharkey died in 1948 his son William Sharkey Jr. took over as publisher of the *Contra Costa Gazette*. Prior to that, Sharkey Jr. had served in the Navy and also worked for the state Department of Motor Vehicles and California Highway Patrol. He is credited with developing the state's first motor vehicle code. The bulk of the Sharkey Collection consists of personal correspondence between Sharkey Jr. and his fiancée (later wife) Dorothy Jessen, family photographs, and a large collection of newspapers featuring front-page articles about noteworthy events of the 19th and 20th centuries including the assassinations of Presidents Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley and Kennedy. The collection also contains information on Sharkey Jr.'s military service, his enrollment at Stanford University, his work at the Department of Motor Vehicles, and some information on the activities of his son William Sharkey III. Other materials include greeting cards, audiotapes, and photographs of the Sharkey family, their friends, and colleagues. Sharkey Jr. died in 1997. The collection was donated by the family in 2010-2011.

Arrangement of Materials: The collection is arranged in 31 boxes, with the items placed loosely in the boxes. The boxes include the material listed here. The list starts with Box B because there is no Box A.

Box B

Correspondence between Sharkey Jr. and Dorothy Jessen 1925-1928

Box C

Correspondence between Sharkey and Dorothy Jessen 1929-1930

Box D

1931-1950s:

Correspondence between Sharkey and Dorothy Jessen

Papers relating to Sharkey and the Department of Motor Vehicles

Contra Costa Gazette publishing documents

Navy Reserve Treasure Island

Finance

U.S. military

Stanford University internships and fraternity material

Correspondence between Sharkey family and Wider family

Correspondence with Sharkey relatives and family friends

Box E

Correspondence between Dorothy Jessen Sharkey and her parents and siblings (some of the correspondence is in Danish), 1929-36

Framed citation to Will Sharkey from the Automobile Manufacturers Association for his contribution to safer automobiles, dated June 16, 1960.

Box F

Miscellaneous material relating to Sharkey's various jobs and civic groups

Newspaper coverage of Nikita Krushchev's visit to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco in 1959

Legal papers from 1876 and a lawsuit filed in San Francisco Superior Court in 1885

Nelda Rego newspaper clippings, some folded in a small envelope

Obituary of Sharkey Jr.'s mother Nan Elizabeth Gott Sharkey (d. 1969).

Ephemera from trips

Publications regarding America's relations with Japan and with Asia in general in the 1920s and 1930s

California Vehicle Code, 1920s and 1930s (Sharkey is credited with creating the state vehicle code)

Small box containing a "4 Minute Man" ID card for Will Sharkey Sr. from the federal Committee on Public Information during WWII (the 4 Minute Men were people who gave propaganda talks to local groups on supporting the war effort).

Typewritten lyrics to popular songs including "Auld Lang Syne" and "Home On the Range"

Newspaper clippings from undated, unidentified newspapers on a variety of subjects, including a newspaper printing of President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Box G

Scrapbooks (nine) of newspaper clippings on various subjects

Box H (also labelled Box 6)

Files and photographs on Sharkey Jr.'s Navy service

History of the *Contra Costa Gazette*

Timeline of newspaper history 1860-1914

Ephemera on various other subjects

Folded "Victory Library Loan" banner (a WWII fundraising loan program from the federal government)

Clippings from the San Francisco Call Bulletin of August 8, 1885, the day of Ulysses Grant's funeral
Harpers New Monthly Magazine of December 1868 with an article about President Andrew Johnson's
pardon of Jefferson Davis

Copy of "The Household," a newspaper "dedicated to the interests of the American housewife" March
1862.

Invoices and receipts from various businesses including the Centennial Hotel in Martinez and tailors in
San Francisco and Napa.

Clipped together:

Typewritten history of Contra Costa County and personal memoir (1900-1950) by Dr. C.L.
Abbott;

Correspondence concerning Sharkey's appointment to the War History Committee of Contra
Costa County, which worked on documenting the history of County residents' involvement in
World War I;

Typewritten history of Redding and the Bear Flag Rebellion by Peter T. Conmy, Grand Historian
of the Native Songs of the Golden West, February 15, 1944;

Folder of Sharkey correspondence 1936-37.

Folder with photocopies of articles about Sharkey and his newspapers (from various Northern California
newspapers)

Box I

Portrait photographs of Sharkey family members

Photograph of the California state legislature in 1946 and other group photographs

Newspaper clippings on various subjects

A book, History of Richmond, California: The City that Grew From A Rancho, by Joseph C. Whitnah
(1944)

Correspondence

Photocopies of newspaper articles about explosion at the Shell Refinery in Martinez on Sept. 5, 1989

Reprint of the Declaration of Independence

Copy of Grizzly Bear Magazine, February 1915 published by the Native Sons and Daughters of the
Golden West (a few of the articles mention Contra Costa people or places).

Papers and articles on the attempted recall effort against State Senator James C. Owens (Marin/Contra
Costa) in 1914 (the recall, spearheaded by labor organizations, made the ballot but failed).

Souvenir program from the Martinez 49er Committee celebrating the state's centennial, August 4-7,
1949.

Ephemera file containing Sharkey family photographs, invitations and notices.

Box J

Letters and cards (loose), many unopened

Box K

Greeting cards (loose)

Correspondence

First two editions of *Boy Scout Times* from March 28, 1919

Box L

Greeting cards (loose)

Box M

Autograph book belonging to Nan Gott Sharkey

Family history

An envelope containing audio tapes

Newspaper clippings on various subjects
Frames for newspaper photograph identification
Folder of papers related to the California Highway Patrol

Box N

Correspondence

Programs of events

Life Magazine, Nov. 26, 1956 with actress Ingrid Bergman on the cover and a feature article about Soviet incursions into Poland

Copy of the 25th anniversary edition of the *Walnut Kernel*, a weekly business advertiser published in Walnut Creek, dated 1957.

Box O

Certificates

Newspapers including the *Crockett Signal* (June 19, 1936), Sunday *S.F. Chronicle* (July 3, 1881) covering the assassination of President Garfield, and eleven copies of the *Contra Costa Gazette* (February 18, 1950) covering California's statehood centennial celebration; the *S.F. Examiner* (September 13, 1901) covering the assassination of President McKinley, and a fragment of the *New York Herald* (April 15, 1865) covering the assassination of President Lincoln.

Box P

Newspapers including the *Fresno Bee* (September 15, 1929) covering the wedding of Sharkey Jr. and Dorothy Jessen; the *Martinez News Gazette* (several 1988 dates); the *Martinez Daily Standard* of June 6, 1929; the *S.F. Chronicle* (November 25, 1963) covering the assassination of President Kennedy; and numerous editions of local Contra Costa newspapers including the *Pleasant Hill/Martinez Record*, the *Morning News Gazette*, the *Antioch Ledger* and the *Contra Costa Times*.

Box Q

Newspapers covering the wedding of Dorothy Jessen to Sharkey Jr.; issues of the *Sierra Valley Leader* from 1895 and the *Martinez Daily Standard* from 1915; and a *Martinez Daily Standard* article about the re-election of State Senator Will Sharkey from August 27, 1924, among others.

Box R

Various newspapers, many of which are deteriorating and must be handled carefully. They include the *San Francisco Chronicle* of November 12, 1936 covering the opening of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, the *San Francisco Examiner* of June 6, 1944 covering the landing of the U.S. invasion at Normandy, and various military newspapers covering World War II.

Box S

Newspapers including the *Contra Costa Gazette* of May 11, 1943 covering Japan's threat to bomb the United States, the *San Francisco Examiner* of February 21, 1962 covering astronaut John Glenn's landing back on earth, and the *Contra Costa Morning News Gazette* of February 8, 1964 covering the Beatles' arrival in New York.

Box T

Local newspapers, including the *Contra Costa Times* from the 1980s and 1990s with front page articles on the Loma Prieta Earthquake of 1989, the Oakland Hills Firestorm of 1991, and the San Francisco 49ers trading Joe Montana to the Kansas City Chiefs in 1993.

Box U

Correspondence to and from Will Sharkey on his State Senate legislation from the 1920s and 1930s
State Senate daily schedules and resolutions
Western Union telegrams to Sharkey from the 1930s concerning his legislation
Souvenir program from the opening of the Broadway Low-Level Tunnel (later renamed the Caldecott Tunnel) on December 5, 1937

Box V

Correspondence to and from Sharkey and Sharkey Jr., mostly from the 1920s through 1940s.

Box W

Newspapers from the Bay Area from the 1930s through 1990s, including papers from 1906 covering the earthquake and fire and their aftermath
Contra Costa Times editions from September and October 1999 and January 1, 2000 (which was Y2K)
New York Evening Sun dated November 30, 1881 covering the trial of Charles Guiteau for the assassination of President Garfield
Issues of the *Sierra Valley Leader* from the 1890s, some of which are badly torn

Box X

Newspapers
Sunset Magazine editions from the late 1930s and early 1940s
Children's school books
Miscellaneous ephemera

Box Y

Correspondence to and from Sharkey Sr. from the 1920s-1940s.

Box Z

Could not locate

Box 5

Correspondence of Nan Sharkey
Biographical file on Nan Sharkey
William Sharkey Jr. Navy subject file

Box "Sharkey 9/24/15 vol 4 of 5"

Newspaper clippings including obituary of Will Sharkey Sr.

Box 6 Sharkey Collection

William Sharkey Jr. Navy subject file
Contra Costa Gazette History subject file
Gayle Uilkema subject file

Sharkey Collection Box 6 (not the same box as the preceding listing)

Correspondence of Will Sharkey Sr.
Biographical material on Sharkey family 1850s to 1939

Postcards Box 1 of 4

Postcards received by Will Sharkey 1900-1920

Postcards Box 2 of 4

Postcards received by Will and Nan Sharkey, 1911-1920

Postcards Box 4 of 4

Postcards and family photos, mostly undated and unidentified

Could not locate Postcards Box 3 of 4

Indexing Terms: Correspondence, journalism, newspaper clippings, politics, post cards.

Personal Names: William Sharkey Jr., Gayle Uilkema, Dorothy Jessen