

Los Angeles Maritime Museum
Manuscript Collection # 75
Papers of California Shipbuilding Corporation 1941-1945
Finding Aid compiled by Los Angeles Maritime Museum Research Library

Processed By, Date:
Kelsey Knox, May 1, 2015

Title: Papers of California Shipbuilding Corporation

Date(s): 1941-1976 (bulk 1941-1945)

Extent: 10.5 cu. ft. (8 boxes 4x5" negatives; 10 boxes 4x6" photographic prints; 3 record storage boxes); 8.75 linear feet (large oversized print boxes), and 9 linear feet (oversized photographic prints in folders)

Scope and Content Note: Papers of California Shipbuilding Corporation is a collection of manuscript materials, photographs, negatives, publications, and audio/visual materials. These materials were created by and are about California Shipbuilding Corporation, which built 467 cargo transports and tankers as Liberty and Victory ships during World War II. The corporation, sponsored by W.A. Bechtel Corporation and other investors, was built on Terminal Island, near Long Beach and San Pedro, California in 1941. Underscoring their role in the social history of laborers during World War II, is the fact that California Shipbuilding Corporation employed women in historically non-traditional roles in construction and welding as well as in administrative work; the evidence of work done by women is documented in photographic prints in the collection. Terence M. Lee, who was secretary to company President, John A. McCone, assembled the collection of papers and photographs which spans the operating years of the corporation (1941-1945) and beyond. These materials include administrative papers, personnel lists, correspondence, and newspaper clippings, as well as photographs and negatives which represent the company, its business, employee and public relations. A full run of the California Shipbuilding Corporation publication, *Calship Log*, which was published weekly until September 1941 when it became a bi-monthly publication, informs a series in the collection. Additionally, materials are included about the investigation into California Shipbuilding Corporation in 1946, when the company was accused of spending government money on gifts for the ship sponsors. Post-dating the operations of the California Shipbuilding Corporation, a collection of folders are included along with an album containing data and biographic statements about John McCone, including his years at California Shipbuilding Corporation, written by Terence Lee.

Format: Manuscript, photographs, negatives, publications, audio/visual. Photographic prints form the bulk of the collection.

Creator: Terence M. Lee.

Provenance: The California Shipbuilding Corporation collection was kept in a private residence after the corporation dissolved until it was donated to the museum in 2003.

Access: Prior arrangement with the Curator or Archivist for all collection material.

Usage restrictions: Copyright restrictions apply to the collection. Please inquire in writing.

Catalog record: Papers of California Shipbuilding Corporation

Processing information: Kelsey Knox, May 2015; finding aid Kelsey Knox, May 2015

Abstract:

Papers of California Shipbuilding Corporation were created by and are about California Shipbuilding Corporation, which built Liberty and Victory ships during World War II. The shipyard was located at Terminal Island, near Long Beach and San Pedro, California. The manuscript materials, photographs, and audio/visual materials were generated for public relations, to announce ship launchings in local newspapers and to keep employees informed about company events and news in their publication, *CalShip Log*, between 1941 and 1945.

Biographical history:

California Shipbuilding Corporation was created by the United States Maritime Commission as an emergency shipyard to build liberty ships during World War II. Its facilities were built on Terminal Island, California in early 1941, and included fourteen shipways and ten outfitting docks, warehouses, equipment buildings, administrative offices, and more.

During its years of operation, The California Shipbuilding Corporation built 467 cargo and transport ships.

Ground was broken at Terminal Island in January of 1941. Nine months later S.S. JOHN C. FREMONT became the first ship to be completed and launched. It took nearly eight months to build, but was completed 45 days ahead of schedule. It launched on September 27, 1941, called "Liberty Fleet Day", a day celebrated as launching day for 11 other liberty ships at shipyards around the country.

After launching S.S. JOHN C. FREMONT, the shipbuilding process began to move much faster. Four additional ships were launched in the last three months of 1941. The fastest vessel to be constructed was S.S. FINLEY P. DUNNE, which only took 31 days to construct. The final ship built at California Shipbuilding Corporation, S.S. COUNCIL BLUFFS VICTORY, was launched on September 27, 1945.

Each completed ship was launched with pomp and circumstance. Each ship had a sponsor, who was in charge of christening the ship traditionally with a champagne bottle. Sponsors ranged from wives of employees and personnel to contest winners to film and radio stars. Notable sponsors included movie star Bette Davis, singer Marian Anderson, and Mrs. Walt Disney, wife of the entertainment industry entrepreneur.

Arrangement and Description:

The collection is arranged by format in six series.

Series I. Manuscript Materials: Contains the administrative and historical papers of California Shipbuilding Corporation, as well as a subseries of newspaper clippings and guest books from the shipyard at Terminal Island. Arranged in 3 subseries.

Subseries 1, Administrative Papers: Includes correspondence of the President of the corporation, John McCone, information on visitors to the shipyard, personnel lists, and invitation lists for various special events. This subseries also includes statements, telegrams, memos, correspondence and news clippings regarding the Senatorial and Congressional investigation of California Shipbuilding Corporation between 1946 and 1947.

Subseries 2, News Clippings: Contains clippings from local newspapers, including Los Angeles Herald Express and Long Beach Press Telegram. Most of these clippings pertain to the launchings of ships by the California Shipbuilding Corporation, but there are also clippings about special milestones in the company's history and about the Congressional hearings.

Subseries 3, Guest Books: Contains five guest books, dated variously from September 1941 to October 1945. These books contain the signatures of guests to the shipyard, as well as the day on which they visited.

Series II. Loose Photographs: Consists of loose photographic materials, such as photographic prints, negatives, oversized photographs, and glass slides. Arranged in 5 subseries.

Subseries 1, Photographs: Contains photographic prints from existing negatives representing shipyard events that took place between 1941 and 1946. The majority of images depict launching ceremonies, the ship "sponsor" and "maid of honor". Photographs depict a combination of launching ceremonies and sea trials, with group shots of the involved men and women. As a counterpoint to static portraits of sponsors and dignitaries, the christening was considered complete when the sponsor smashed a champagne bottle against the ship's bow, and the resulting explosion was captured in a photograph of the ship's launching day. Some sponsors were celebrities, including Shirley Temple, Marian Anderson, and Bette Davis, while others represented other persons of note as well as the shipyard staff. Other photographic prints in this series include the shipyard offices, meetings, model ships, and office workers. Significantly, there are select images of women in the shipbuilding trades, especially welding.

Subseries 2, Film Negatives: The majority of film negatives are 4"x5" and smaller, with some 5"x7" negatives. The negatives are coded to match and correspond to existing prints in the collection. In many instances there are more negatives from a particular date than printed photographs. Also within the subseries of negatives are a number of studio portraits of ship sponsors and people of note, and these do not have corresponding photographic prints. Some images are arranged by the coding, while others are arranged alphabetically by name. Negatives are paired with a card that identifies the person, and in some cases, what ship launching they were involved with or what their relevance is to the California Shipbuilding Corporation. An inventory taken of the image includes all names in the subseries. Some persons of note include Irene Dunne and Clark Gable.

Subseries 3, Glass Slides: The glass slides are 3^{1/4}" x 4" of ships built by California Shipbuilding Corporation; there are also slides of launching ceremonies and ship sponsors, as well as workers bearing flags at the shipyard.

Subseries 4, Oversized Photographic Prints: Many of these prints are larger versions of the loose, numbered photographs. There are oversized photographs of launchings and ceremonies, as well as aerial views of the shipyard and photographs of the completed ships.

Subseries 5, California Shipbuilding Corporation's Index to Photographs: Index cards with notes and references to each photographic print and negative are filed alphabetically by name.

An outline of the organization of loose photographs follows:

When the collection was received at the Museum, California Shipbuilding Corporation had numbered the small format photographic prints and their negatives with a code. The codes represented dates of ship launches, with the following example as typical: 2M12-6-8, where M stands for month, 2M for 1942, and the rest of the code translating to December 6, with number 8 designating a specific photograph taken for that launch. This was the firm's way of keeping track of the extensive collection of photographs taken at launches, at the yard, and of select personnel.

Photographs and negatives with a #M#-# code are arranged chronologically. Other coded photographs, including "L", "P", "PX", and "F" are arranged thematically. It is unknown what these codes mean.

Series III. Photograph Albums: The collection arrived with 11 photograph albums or binders containing photographic prints, 8" x 10" and larger. The binders appear to have been compiled after the dissolution of the firm, well after World War II: they contain photographic prints taken by the company and match subject matter in the loose photographs in Series II. Each binder containing images from ship launchings, photographs of celebrities christening ships, aerial photographs of the shipyard, and photographs of the ships during their sea trials has been rehoused at the Museum and kept in the order of its original thematic grouping.

Series IV. Publications: Contains publications prepared and published by California Shipbuilding Corporation. The largest part of this series is made up of the serial, *CalShip Log*, created by the firm to highlight occasions, employee issues and interest, and events at the shipyard. *CalShip Log* began as a weekly publication with the first issue on September 1, 1941 and subsequently became a bi-monthly publication through September 27, 1945. It included information about ship launchings, special events, as well as articles about workers and even comics. The series contains a folio-sized book about California Shipbuilding Corporation that was published shortly after the war. Other publications describe the physical plant, the built ships, and the corporation and its achievements.

Series V. Audio Visual: Audio and visual materials in the collection include one 45 album of General MacArthur's speech to Congress in April 1951, as well as four film canisters labeled "Carole Lombard", "City on Stilts", "Fremont Launching" and "J.M. McCone". It is unknown exactly what is on these reels.

Series VI. Artifacts: In addition to the manuscript materials, there are two 3-dimensional items in this collection catalogued in the Museum's Objects catalog. These items are:

Table: 16.25" height, 40" width, 22.5" depth: wood with brass relief aerial map of the California Shipbuilding Corporation Terminal Island shipyard under glass.

Souvenir: 6" height, 8" width, 1.75" depth: Bronze section of launching ways mounted on wood base: SS PINE BLUFF VICTORY, Hull number 52, Sponsor: Mrs. Terence M. Lee

Container and Folder Lists

Series I, Manuscript Materials, Subseries 1, Administrative Papers.

Box 1 : Correspondence, documents, office files from California Shipbuilding Corporation, dated 1941-1945. Folder dated 1946 for the Congressional investigation into the firm that year.

Folder # Folder Title, Dated 1941-1948

- 1 Organizational Chart; hierarchy and map of department locations
- 2 Personnel records
- 3 Non-California Shipbuilding file: Conversion on C-60 (Lockhead Lodestar)
- 4 Corporate history, directors, officers
- 5 Correspondence of Admiral Emory S. Land
- 6 Correspondence regarding stockholders
- 7 Certificate of Incorporation; Amendments
- 8 Due diligence documents on proposed shipyard: documentation, graphs, maps, photographs
- 9 Investigation (Folder 1 of 2); Materials on the investigation by the Senate Committee on Expenditures on overpayments made to contractors
- 10 Investigation (Folder 2 of 2)
- 11 Invitation guest lists to events and functions
- 12 Special Dinners: lists of guests
- 13 Man hours by hull and period of construction
- 14 Documents relevant to Medal of Freedom Award
- 15 Department hierarchies, job descriptions
- 16 Personnel for Joshua Hendy Corporation, officers, directors
- 17 Report to the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Investigating Committee
- 18 Ship Launchings and Sea Trials events programs
- 19 Correspondence and photographs of S.S. MARION MCKINLEY BOVARD
- 20 Telephone Directory of employees, including department and work location
- 21 United States Maritime Commission Personnel Directory
- 22 Various Papers, including financial matters and some correspondence
- 23 Photographic prints featuring John McCone at ship launchings; 8" x 10"s

- 24-27 Memos and correspondence regarding visitors
- 28 Terence Lee: Correspondence, ration books, and family photographs
- 29 Letter from Jerry Scanlon, U.S. Maritime Commission
- 30 Western Union telegrams

Series I, Manuscript Materials, Subseries 2, News clippings.

Box 2: (oversized box) Original and photocopied news clippings, 1941-1946. Unfolded.

Series I, Manuscript Materials, Subseries 3, Guest Books.

Box 3 : Folders 1 – 8 Guest-books of California Shipbuilding Corporation, dated September 1941 to October 1945.

Series II, Loose Photographs: Boxes 4-23.

Boxes 4-19 : Quantity, approximately 7200 photographic prints and negatives, glass slides. Boxes contain ship launchings, ships' sea trials, celebrities, sponsors, special events, musical entertainment, construction workers, model ships, inspections, public relations, nautical flags, dignitaries, chief operating officers, managers.

Boxes 4 – 10: Sleeved Photographic prints, organized by launch date

- Box 4: Loose Photographs, 4" x 6", represents launch dates Oct 2, 1941 to April 1, 1942
- Box 5: Loose Photographs, 4" x 6", represents launch dates April 2, 1942 to Sept 18, 1942
- Box 6: Loose Photographs, 4" x 6", represents launch dates Oct. 2, 1941 to March 15, 1943
- Box 7: Loose Photographs, 4" x 6", represents launch dates March 15, 1943 to Aug 26, 1943
- Box 8: Loose Photographs, 4" x 6", represents launch dates Aug 27, 1943 to Aug 26, 1944
- Box 9: Loose Photographs, 4" x 6", represents launch dates Aug 27, 1944 to April 19, 1945
- Box 10: Loose Photographs, 4" x 6", represents launch dates April 19, 1945 to Sept 27, 1945

Boxes 11—18: Sleeved Negatives, 4" x 5" and smaller, organized by launch date as above

- Box 11: Negatives, represent launch dates Sept 27, 1941 to June 18, 1942
- Box 12: Negatives, represent launch dates June 21, 1942 to Jan 24, 1943
- Box 13: Negatives, represent launch dates Jan 26, 1943 to July 24, 1943
- Box 14: Negatives, represent launch dates July 27, 1943 to Aug 1, 1944
- Box 15: Negatives, represent launch dates Aug 1, 1944 to March 29, 1945
- Box 16: Negatives, represent launch dates March 30, 1945 to Sept 27, 1945; various photographs to Feb 1946 (telephone operators at switchboards, empty ships' ways)
- Box 17: Negatives, represent various single and small group portraits
- Box 18: Negatives, represent ships' sponsors, VIPs, etc., not numbered.

Box 19: Glass slides, mostly color.

55 glass slides, measuring 3 1/4" x 4", containing ship launchings and aerial views.

Box 20 & 21, Sleeved Oversized prints, 11" x 14". Quantity, approximately 200. Contains ship launchings, celebrities, sponsors, ceremonies, construction workers, aerial views.

Box 22 & 23, Photographic Index

Index cards (5x4") bearing a ship's name or personal name, with references to negatives and positive prints related to a ships' launchings or other activity at the shipyard. Cards are arranged alphabetically. To locate an image, use the name of a ship, sponsor, maid of honor, staff or management.

Series II, Loose Photographs, Oversized folio files 1-4:**Oversized folio # 1: Quantity: 16 prints.**

Aerial view of shipyard at California Shipbuilding; ships underway or at sea trials include attack transport, SS Pine Bluffs Victory, Rio Orinoco, Bluefield Victory. Black and white, 2 color--16 x 20" prints.

Oversized folio # 2: Quantity: 9 prints.

Ships in ways or at sea trials; other, Bechtel-Parsons aircraft. 11 x 14" black and white and 3 color prints.

Oversized folio # 3: Quantity: 16 prints.

Aerial view of shipyard at California Shipbuilding; ships underway or at sea trials include SS Council Bluffs Victory. 16 x 20" black and white prints.

Oversized folio # 4: 1: Quantity: 13 prints.

Aerial view of ships underway or at sea trials, launching, includes SS Council Bluffs Victory, SS Charles Warfield; John McCone and worker posing with rigging; aerial view of attack transport underway.

Series III, Photograph Albums

Boxes 24 – 29 (6 binder boxes of prints 8 ½" x 11" or smaller) : Quantity, approximately 741.

Thematic groupings are as follows:

Aerial photographs: shipyard at California Shipbuilding Corporation, personnel, launchings.

Launchings, sponsors, celebrities.

Shipyard, Construction progress.

Aircraft, manufacturing plant.

Sea trials of the Council Bluffs Victory, Launchings.

Key personnel at California Shipbuilding Corporation.

Box 30 (record storage box)

Two folios containing photographs of Hull 467 and SS Pine Bluffs Victory.

Folio dedicated to the memory of John M. McCone compiled by Terence Lee.

Series IV, Publications:

Box 31 (record storage box) CalShip Cavalcade, 1942, a publication of the corporation.

Series IV, Publications, continued:

Shelved unbound and bound issues of *CalShip Log*

A complete run of the twice-monthly publication: 9/01/1941 to 09/27/1945.

Series V, Audio/visual Materials:

Box 32

1-long-playing record (Douglas MacArthur's Speech to Congress, April, 1951) and 4 - 16mm motion pictures, including "Carole Lombard", "City on Stilts", "John M. McCone", and launching of the SS John C. Fremont.

Series VI, Museum Artifacts: Please inquire of the Museum Curator or Archivist.