

Shuster Aerial Photograph Collection Finding Aid

Collection Number

2001.01

Contact Information

The Library, Special Collections

Humboldt State University

Arcata, California 95521

URL: <http://library.humboldt.edu/humco/holdings/shuster.htm>

Processed By

Edith Butler, MA, CA

The following individuals assisted the archivist in processing the collection and readying the files for online presentation: Joan Berman, Jeremy Shellhase, Tom Mendenhall, Steve Mottaz, Nate Haas, Aleiha Wayman, Brian Ludy, and Gerald Pusch.

Date Collection Processed

2006

Language

English

Collection Creator

Merle Shuster (1921 - 2006)

Dates Covered by Collection

1946 - 1968 (date span)

1947 - 1963 (bulk dates)

Size of Collection

3 cubic feet; approximately 2400 items

Abstract

Between 1946 and the mid 1960s Merle Shuster was hired by land developers, timber owners, and lumber mill owners to photograph specific sites. Approximately half the images in the collection come from these assignments and the other half are what Mr. Shuster chose to photograph as he was flying to and from the designated site. Most of the images are taken at an oblique angle, giving the viewer a richer sense of the

landscape. Scenes from the burgeoning post-war lumber industry on Humboldt Bay and nearby coastal areas form the majority of the collection. Other scenes include rivers, country roads and farmsteads, small towns, and stunning landscapes. Humboldt Bay, Eureka, Arcata, Trinidad, and Crescent City are particularly well documented. For current location of this collection consult the Humboldt State University Library catalog or visit <http://library.humboldt.edu/humco/holdings/shuster.htm>

Access

The collection is open for research.

Copyright

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Acquisition Information

Merle Shuster donated the aerial photograph collection to Humboldt State University Library in 2001.

Biographical Information

Merle Shuster's interest in photography started when he was in high school. After he graduated from Eureka High School he attended Humboldt State College for two years and then joined the United States Navy for two years. In the Navy Merle received intensive training in photography, including aerial photography. Upon his discharge in 1945 Merle returned to Eureka and took a job at Photo Specialty Shop. He worked there from 1946 until 1960. Merle also gained photograph experience by working at Swanlund Studio and Camera Shop. Merle started his own photography business and by late 1946 was taking on assignments in aerial work as well as special occasions, such as weddings. His friend and fellow photographer, Jack Phegley, encouraged him and sold him the military surplus aerial cameras that Merle used throughout his career. Merle was a member of the American Association of Aerial Photographers.

In 1960 Merle took over the management of Philip's Camera Shop in Arcata while the owner was away for a year. Next he worked at the Humboldt Market grocery store in Eureka for four years, then he was at Proctor's Photographic Engineering Center for two or three years. During all this time he continued his photography business. From 1969 until he retired in 1991 Merle worked for Channel 6 television station in Eureka. Over the years Merle has generously shared his images with researchers and publishers. Many of them have been published in a wide assortment of reports and publications.

Merle used three cameras in his aerial work, but it was the F-8 that produced the 5x7 negatives that make up the majority of the collection. The other cameras are a K-24 and a 4x5 Speed Graphic.

Merle's sister, Evelyn Shuster Worthen, wrote about some aspects of the Shuster family history in a book titled, *A Castle in Fairyland and other stories of The Carson Family and their Mansions*.

Scope and Content of the Collection

This photographic collection is comprised of 2313 images: 2248 negatives and 65 prints with no accompanying negative. Mr. Shuster's master index contained entries for 2463 items so the database created for the collection has 2463 records. There are 148 records in the database for which, at this time, we have neither a negative nor a print. There are contact prints and/or 8"x10" prints for approximately 15% of the collection. There are about 15 ground level images, the rest are aerial and were taken from a wide range of altitudes.

Merle Shuster was hired by land developers and lumber mill or timberland owners to photograph specific sites. Approximately half the images in the collection come from these assignments and the other half are what Mr. Shuster chose to photograph. As Mr. Shuster was flown to and from his destinations he would take photos of many of the scenes passing below. Most of the images are taken at an oblique angle, giving viewers a more detailed look at the landscape. Scenes from the burgeoning post-war lumber industry (mills, log ponds, timberlands, ships), Eureka, Arcata, new housing subdivisions, Humboldt Bay and the waterfronts of Eureka and the Samoa area form the backbone of the collection. Other scenes include rivers, farmsteads, small towns, and stunning landscapes.

Arrangement of the Collection

The collection is arranged in a single series. Users may access the digital version [online](#).

Information about each image was recorded in an Microsoft Access database which is linked to the image. Digital files of the negatives were created at the Preservation Services Division of OCLC in Pennsylvania using a BetterLight Super 8K scanner and were scanned at 900 pixels per inch in grayscale. They were then inverted to positive images. Gif and Jpeg files are online, and the Tif files are maintained in the library's Special Collections offices. A grant from the Humboldt State University's Research and Creative Activities competition funded part of the cost of creating the digital files.

The photograph prints with no matching negative will be scanned at the HSU Library and the digital images added to the online database.

All of the original negatives, envelopes, index, and prints have been retained.

The collection was kept in the order in which it arrived, and followed Mr. Shuster's chronological index list. He started new numbering systems during the course of his work so for clarification it was necessary to assign new numbers to the images. The original number is noted in the database in the field named "Author's number".

The nature of aerial photographs in general, and the wide variety of types of shots in this collection in particular, make cataloging more complex than for ground level images. Mr. Shuster assigned titles to the images. To aid researchers, alternate titles were assigned where Shuster's title contained minimal information. Generally the images show a geographic area larger than the one described in the title. Merle used the words "high" and "low" to indicate that he was flying at an altitude different than usual. Close up is reflected by "CU" within the title. "LS" means long shot.

In assigning subject headings for this collection the following practices were observed. Features such as rivers, creeks, roads, railroads are listed as subjects when they are central to the image, but not in every instance where they occur in an image. "Forests and Forestry" is the term used for rural lands that include forests as well as prairies and rangelands. "Farms and Farming" includes ranches. "Humboldt Bay" was assigned whenever any portion of it is in the image because the bay is generally useful in getting oriented to the location in the image. The term "mills" is used when there is one or more wood products mill in the image; different types of mill are not differentiated. "People" is used when there are significant numbers of them in an image and their presence is likely to be the reason the photo was taken.

There are numerous images of log ponds, especially the one at Big Lagoon. These were used to inventory the logs in the pond. A pin was stuck through each log in the image and the pin holes were counted from the backside of the image.

Related Collections at the Humboldt State University Library

[Western Air Photo Collection](#)

Bibliography

"Aerial Photography In Humboldt Through The Camera Of Merle Shuster"; The News Guide, January 9, 1948, p. 1.

Worthen, Evelyn Shuster. A Castle in Fairyland and other stories of The Carson Family and their Mansions. Eureka: Eureka Printing Company, 1984.

Subject Headings

Humboldt County

Humboldt Bay

Eureka

Arcata

lumbering

forests and forestry

transportation

aerial photography

housing

land use