The Descriptive Finding Guide for the Albert S. Menasco Collection
SDASM.SC.10097

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San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives
1/30/2016
2001 Pan American Plaza, Balboa Park
San Diego 92101
URL: http://www.sandiegoairandspace.org/
Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives
Title: Albert S. Menasco Personal Papers
Identifier/Call Number: SDASM.SC.10097
Physical Description: .6 Cubic Feet The collection contains a large scrapbook with items collected throughout Menasco’s life and career. Documents are both corporate and personal and span from his WWI service in the U.S. Army to after his death in 1988. The collection contains numerous photos, also personal and corporate-related. The collection also contains multiple Menasco corporate publications. Collection dates: 1919-1988. The collection is housed in 3 archival boxes.
Date (bulk): bulk
Abstract: Born in Los Angeles in 1897, Albert S. Menasco was a key figure in the design of airplane engines in the years between the two World Wars.
Conditions Governing Access
This collection is open to the public by appointment.
Conditions Governing Use
For copyright and use restrictions please consult the library director.
Immediate Source of Acquisition
This collection of materials was donated to the San Diego Air and Space Museum.
Related Materials
Menasco company files
https://www.flickr.com/photos/sdasmarchives/sets/72157644632303847
Biographical / Historical
Born in Los Angeles in 1897, Albert S. Menasco was a key figure in the design of airplane engines in the years between the two World Wars. A high school dropout in Los Angeles, he became a wing-walker on stunt airplanes. Rejected by the Army in World War I because of a hearing impairment, he became a civilian instructor in aircraft engineering for the Signal Corps at Langley Field, Va.
He resumed his automotive career after the, including racing midget cars of his own construction, until a friend gave him some war-surplus airplane engines. He promptly started the Menasco Motors Corp. to modify the engines for commercial use. When that failed, Menasco set out to design his own motors, and in 1929 he came out with the first of a series of in-line, air-cooled engines. Menasco’s greatest success came in racing, where his in-line engines were modified for high performance, won regularly” Before long it was powering aircraft that won major prizes, including the Thompson Trophy in 1937.
Menasco’s innovations in the configuration of engine parts to increase the efficiency of air-cooling found their way into many subsequent aircraft motors, but by 1938 he had left the company he founded. The company was later sold to Colt Industries. Menasco Motors began to specialize in landing gear, and the company would go on to build landing gear for the Space Shuttle.
Menasco opened a car dealership, tried his hand at grape cultivation and winemaking, and was sought out for advice by aviators and engine manufacturers for the rest of his life, which ended in 1988. At some point, Menasco began close friends with actor Clark Gable. Menasco was best man for Gable’s wedding to Kay Spreckles, which took place at Menasco’s St. Helena winery. Today the property is owned by the Marston Family Vineyard.
Subjects and Indexing Terms
Menasco manufacturing company, Burbank, Calif.
Aeronautics -- History
Menasco, Albert S.

SERIES I: Scrapbook Box 1 of 3
Physical Description: Scrapbook – Life of Menasco. This scrapbook contains items ranging in dates from his Army service in WWI, to correspondence with his widow in 1988. The items are both personal, and corporate related.
SERIES II: Photos Box 2 of 3

Physical Description: Three folders of photos sorted by size. Photo dates range from early 1990s to 1980s. Interesting photos include Art Smith, Bernt Balchen, Allan and Malcolm Lockheed, Clark Gable, Victor Fleming, Kay Spreckles, (Motorcycle photo is Gable, Ward Bond and Victor Fleming at Menasco’s St. Helena property.

SERIES III: Publications Box 3 of 3

Physical Description: Multiple publications from the Menasco Company