Guide to The Royden Thornberg Papers

Title: The Royden Thornberg Papers
Date: 1895-1955
Collection number: 2003-43
Collectors: Thornberg, Royden
Extent: 4 linear feet
Repository: History San Jose Research Library
San Jose, CA 95112

Abstract: Papers of Royden "Roy" Thornberg, telegrapher, radio operator, inventor, and proprietor of the Thornberg Electrical Works on Natoma Street in San Francisco, California. Includes business records, radio operator materials, reference notebooks with research on electricity, electrical and mechanical equipment, and electrical and radio equipment brochures.

Physical location: History San Jose Collection Center
Languages: The majority of the collection material is in English with the exception of one periodical in French.

Access
The papers are available for researchers by appointment through the Curator of Library and Archives.

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Preferred Citation
The Royden Thornberg Papers, 2003-43. History San Jose Research Library, San Jose, California.

Acquisition Information
The Thornberg Papers were originally donated to the Foothill Electronics Museum in 1970, and were received by History San Jose in 2003 as part of the Perham Collection of Early Electronics.

Processing History
Partially processed in 2003, and completed in 2013 by History San Jose Research Library staff.

Related Collections
This collection is directly related to the rest of the Perham Collection of Early Electronics (2003-1) by provenance and by subject matter; original correspondence between Thornberg and Gilson Willets is part of the Perham History Files (2003-33).

Other Finding Aids
History San Jose's PastPerfect catalog, which includes many digitized images, is searchable at http://historysanjose.pastperfect-online.com, and contains complete folder- and item-level records for these papers.

Biography
Royden Thornberg was born October 6, 1891, in San Francisco, California, and worked as a telegrapher, radio operator and inventor, as well as proprietor of the Thornberg Electrical Works on Natoma Street in San Francisco. Thornberg inherited the electrical business from his father, A. F. Thornberg. Much of their work between 1907 through 1915 involved installation and maintenance of marine wireless equipment. As part of this marine work, Thornberg himself tested the equipment on board the ships until new operators could be "broken in." This led to jobs as an operator with many wireless telegraph companies between 1908 and 1924, including Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America, Massie, De Forest Wireless Telegraph and Telephone Company, and Federal Telegraph Company using the Poulsen Arc system. Thornberg earned his Commercial Radio License, Second Class, in March 1915, and the service record on his license documents his time on the U.S.S. Arizona between March and December 1915 under Lt. Commander H. R. Patterson. Thornberg was also an inventor; his "Electrical Disinfector and Deodorizer" was patented in the U.S. on 19 June 1917, and he developed several other devices including chemically-treated fuel to repel insects. During World War II, Thornberg and his colleague, John Jardine, built motor generators for power supplies to U.S. Navy radar equipment. The shop also handled maintenance of relief sumps and automatic pumping plants in San Francisco buildings. Thornberg Electrical Works closed...
its doors between 1953 and 1956 after Jardine and Thornberg's wife passed away in succession, and Thornberg became too ill to maintain his business. (Source: Letters from Royden Thornberg to Gilson Willets, 1956, Perham History Files, History San Jose Research Library and Archives).

**Scope and Content Summary**

Papers of Royden "Roy" Thornberg, telegrapher, radio operator, inventor, and proprietor of the Thornberg Electrical Works on Natoma Street in San Francisco, California. Includes business records, radio operator materials, reference notebooks with research on electricity, electrical and mechanical equipment, and electrical and radio equipment brochures. One notebook, dated 1895, is signed "A. F. Thornberg," and may have belonged to Roy's father, who is listed as the proprietor of Thornberg Electric Co. circa 1931.

Of note are the technical drawings and descriptions for Royden Thornberg's inventions, including his "Sanitary Electric Deodorizer and Disinfectant," patented in 1917, "Fumer-Fuel," a chemically treated camp fuel to be used as an insect repellent, and the "Geo-chronoscope."

Also of interest are Thornberg's radio operator materials, including his diary from his service on the U.S.S. Arizona, with handwritten reference notes (1915); Thornberg's original exam for the International Correspondence School's "Introduction to Radio" course (1930); a typed list of Pacific Coast Radio Stations, "correct for month Nov. 1917;" a brochure for the Pacific Radio School located at 735 Larkin Street, San Francisco; and four badges.

Two folders of personal ephemera reflect an interest in spiritualism, philosophy, music, and possible membership in the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry.

**Indexing Terms**

These and related materials may be found under the following headings in online catalogs.

**Subjects**

Thornberg, Royden, 1891-
Thornberg, A. F.
Thornberg Electrical Works (San Francisco, Calif.)
Inventors--United States--California.
Stores, Retail--Electric equipment.
Radio operators.
Business records.
Family-owned business enterprises.
San Francisco (Calif.)

**Genres and Forms of Materials**

ephemera
research notes
photographs
account books
notebooks