Guide to the William Ross Aiken Papers

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Title: William Ross Aiken Papers
Date: 1944-2007
Date (bulk): (bulk 1955-1996)
Collection number: 2009-42.
Creator: Aiken, William Ross, 1919-2007
Extent: 1.5 linear feet
Repository: History San Jose Research Library
San Jose, CA 95112
Abstract: Professional papers regarding inventions and patents, with some personal papers. Of particular interest are Aiken's original research journals. The collection contains photographs, photographic negatives, and a biography of Kurt von Tauchendorf, Aiken's patent attorney, written jointly by Aiken and von Tauchendorf.
Physical location: History San Jose Collection Center
Languages: EnglishFrenchItalianChineseGerman
Access
The Records are available to the public for research by appointment.
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Preferred Citation
William Ross Aiken Papers 2009-42, History San Jose Research Library, San Jose, California 95112-2599.
Acquisition Information
The collection was donated in 2009 by Aiken's wife, Harriette H. Aiken.
Processing History
Received and accessioned by History San Jose in August, 2009. Processed and cataloged by History San Jose volunteers, October 2009-March 2010. The documents in the collection were cataloged at folder and item level; some photographs were cataloged individually. All catalog records are held in the Research Library's database.
Biography
William Ross Aiken was born February 19, 1919, in Maui, Hawaii. He attended Los Angeles City College for two years, but his education was interrupted by war work. From 1941-1947, he worked in the Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond, California, as an electrical and mechanical draughtsman and supervisor of communications. In 1946, he founded Ross Radio Corporation, which produced high quality radio-phonographs. Aiken graduated in 1947 with a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of California at Berkeley, and subsequently joined the University of California Radiation Laboratory (now Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory), where he developed instrumentation and controls for nuclear accelerators.
In 1940 Aiken took a leave of absence at the request of the Laboratory's director, Dr. Ernest O. Lawrence, to help develop the Lawrence color tube. Upon returning to the Lab in 1951, Aiken led a group working on instrumentation for nuclear devices for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission as part of Project Greenhouse. He applied this experience to his work in Livermore, California, and Mercury, Nevada, where he developed devices and techniques for nuclear research while working on a prototype of the thin cathode ray tube.
In the early 1950s, Aiken became Director of Research at Kaiser Aircraft and Electronics (now a part of Rockwell-Collins). There he further developed the Kaiser-Aiken Thin Cathode Ray Tube, used in aircraft instrumentation and other flat screen displays. Mr. Aiken formed Electronics Ten, Inc., in the early 1960s to improve on the Kaiser-Aiken thin tube, and produce an automatic audio control he designed. In the 1970s, he became Vice President of Research and Development for Display Technology Corporation (DTC) of Cupertino, California, which produced an indoor/outdoor electrostatic sign developed by Aiken.
In 1959, Aiken successfully ran for city councilman in his home town of Los Altos Hills, California. He served as a councilman from 1960-1970, during which time he served one term as mayor. He was a member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and a fellow of the Society for Information Display. Aiken held over 100 patents. Of particular interest are those for the thin cathode-ray tube, quadular modulation audio control, an electrostatic display system, and solid state displays. In the early 1980s, after his retirement, he wrote and published two computer manuals, *Hard Disk, Made Easy*, and *Cheatbook for Wordstar*.
Aiken died in Los Altos Hills in February 2007.
Scope and Content Summary

The collection is arranged into three series:

- Series 3. Patents and Research Notes, 1949-1978. 10 folders (includes 1 book and 7 journals).

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in History San Jose's archives catalog.

Subjects

Aiken, William R.
von Tauchendorf, Kurt
Lawrence, Ernest O.
Display Technology Corporation (DTC)
Distec System, The
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
Kaiser Aerospace and Electronics Corporation
Kaiser Industries Corporation
Kaiser Shipyards (Richmond, Calif.)
Ross Radio Corporation
U.S. Atomic Energy Commission

Genres and Forms of Materials

Biographies.
Black-and-white photographs.
Brochures.
Color photographs.
Correspondence.
Diaries.
Patents.

2009-1: Perham Collection of Early Electronics
William Ross Aiken. An interview conducted by Jamieson Cobleigh, IEEE History Center, 30 October 1996


Box No. 1

Series 1. **Biographical information, professional associations, career history 1944-2007**

Physical Description: 7 folders.

Series Scope and Content Summary

The first series contains biographical sketches and a limited amount of material relating to Aiken's political career in the town of Los Altos Hills, California, as well as materials relating to professional associations and an oral history given to the IEEE History Center. This series also includes materials relating to Aiken's early career at Kaiser's Richmond shipyards, his interest in radio, and early computer manuals.

Of particular interest are correspondence regarding flat CRT donations to the Center for the History of Electronic Engineering which were later relocated to the Harvard Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments, and publications related to Aiken's Radio and Shipyard Public Address System.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box No. 1</th>
<th>Series 2. Thin Cathode-Ray Tube: Invention, Development, Promotion 1955-1996</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Physical Description:</strong> 9 folders.</td>
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<td><strong>Series Scope and Content Summary</strong></td>
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<td>The second series deals with the invention and development of the thin cathode ray tube from 1955-1996, and consists mainly of materials from Aiken's tenure at Kaiser Electronics. This series includes retrospective materials, photographs, correspondence, and promotional materials for commercial and military applications of the thin cathode ray tube. Folders 8 and 10 follow the history of the thin cathode-ray tube development and subsequent improvements at Kaiser Laboratory, including photographs of the lab and physical components. Folders 9, 11, and 12 contain a comprehensive collection of Aiken's publications on thin tube technology. Folder 13 contains Aiken's speeches on the thin tube, while Folders 14 and 15 contain Aiken's correspondence, mostly to magazine editors, including accompanying articles. Folder 16 contains newspaper clippings and miscellaneous memos, reports and photographs.</td>
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<th>Box Nos. 1, 2</th>
<th>Series 3. Patents and Research Notes 1949-1978</th>
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<td><strong>Series Scope and Content Summary</strong></td>
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<td>The third series contains Aiken's patents (U.S. and international) and research notes. The patents are arranged chronologically. Foreign patents included in the collection are from Belgium, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy and Asia. Also included is <em>Dossier von Tauchendorf</em>, a book based on the life of Kurt von Tauchendorf (aka Kurt Tauchendorf), Aiken's patent attorney. The majority of the research notes are found in Box 2. These hand-written journals contain notes, photographs, negatives, and research data. Subjects include solid state display (a color TV panel), audio compressors, automatic volume control, audio compressors, and electrostatic signs later produced by Display Technology Corp.</td>
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