Finding Aid to the American Sugar Refinery Company Records, 1879-1903 MS 0052

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Collection Summary
Title: American Sugar Refinery Company Records
Date (inclusive): 1879-1903
Collection Number: MS 0052
Creator: American Sugar Refinery Company
Physical Description:
Extent: 5 volumes
(1.0 Linear feet)
Repository: California Historical Society
678 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA, 94105
415-357-1848
reference@calhist.org
URL: http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/
Physical Location: Collection is stored onsite.
Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English.
Abstract: Two volumes of bylaws (1879 and 1885), a journal (1890-1895), a cashbook (1890-1903), and a general ledger (1890-1903).
Access
Collection is open for research.
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[Identification of item], American Sugar Refinery Company Records. MS 52, California Historical Society.
Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
American Sugar Refining Company
Bay Sugar Refinery
Havemeyers & Elder
Low, C. Adolphe
Spreckels, C. A. (Claus August), 1858?-1946
Bylaws.
Cashbooks.
Journals (accounts)
Ledgers (account books)
Sugar factories-California-San Francisco.
Sugarcane industry-California-San Francisco.
Immediate Source of Acquisition
Donor unknown.
Accruals
No additions are expected.
Processing Information
Processed by Jennifer Schaffner in 1999.
Institutional History
The American Sugar Refinery was formed in 1879 with the purchase of the Bay Refinery, which had initially been established by Claus Spreckels in 1864. Spreckels (the "sugar king of California") "organized" the Bay Sugar Refining Company in 1863, his start in the sugar industry. He bought the machinery in New York and returned to San Francisco to build the refinery. Soon thereafter he sold the refinery with a good profit.

Hittell, writing in 1882, places the plant at Union and Battery. He reports the owner then to have been C. Adolphe Low, whose name appears on the first bylaws in these records. Shuck reports in 1897 that the company was then bought by Havemeyers and Elder, New York. Ironically perhaps, Henry O. Havemeyer was Spreckels' rival, having organized the American Sugar Refining Co., which was a cartel, or trust, of sugar producers.

The American Sugar Refinery Company should apparently not be confused with the American Sugar Refining Co., although the journal, general ledger and cashbook in these records do have the name of the cartel stamped on the pages from 1897 on. According to Adler, the trust, based largely on the East Coast and in the Midwest, wanted to share the West Coast market with Spreckels. When Spreckels declined, the American Sugar Refining Co. then gained control of its near namesake. Adler reports that the state of California filed suit in 1888 (?) against the American Sugar Refinery for selling out to the cartel. During the court fight the refinery was closed, but reopened in 1890.

Spreckels retaliated against the American Sugar Refining Company cartel by building his own refinery in Philadelphia. A price war ensued, with the trust selling sugar below cost on the West Coast. The price war ended in 1891, when the cartel bought controlling interests in Spreckels' Philadelphia and Bay Area refineries. Hearings were held in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1911 regarding price-fixing ("the great sugar war between old man Claus Spreckels and Havemeyer" - p. 1928) and other monopolistic practices by the American Sugar Refining Co. The California companies figure in minor ways, but Spreckels' son and other sugar magnates were questioned in detail.

- There are but 2 refineries now in operation on the Pacific Coast, both of which are located in San Francisco -- the California Sugar Refinery, on Eighth and Brannan streets, owned by Claus Spreckels and his associates; and the American Sugar Refinery (formerly known as the Bay Sugar Refinery), on Union and Battery streets, belonging to C. Adolphe Low & Co....
- The American Sugar Refinery, formerly known as the Bay Sugar Refinery, located on the corner of Battery and Union streets, was formerly in the hands of an incorporation of which Claus Spreckels was the president. In 1879 the property was sold to a company of which C. Adolph Low is the president. Since changing hands the capacity of the works has been doubled.
- Havemeyer was here reported to be the power behind the American Sugar Refining Co., a large trust. Here Spreckels is reported to have resisted the trust, by building the sugar plant in Philadelphia that was so controversial in the House's price-fixing hearings.
- Bay Sugar Refinery est. by Spreckels in 1864, sold in 1866, destroyed by fire June 19, 1876. American Sugar Refinery succeeded Bay Sugar Refinery in 1879, bought by Havemeyers & Elder, New York in March 1889.

**Scope and Contents**

The records include bylaws dated 1879 and 1885, a journal from 1890 to 1903, a general ledger for 1890 to 1903, and a cashbook covering 1890 through 1903.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td><em>Bylaws 1879, 1885</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Journal 1890-1895</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Cashbook 1890-1903</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>General ledger 1890-1903</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>