
Guide to the California Shipbuilding Corporation (CalShip) Collection, 1941-1945

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Overview of the Collection

Collection Title: California Shipbuilding Corporation (CalShip) Collection

Dates: 1941-1945

Identification: URB/CALSHIP

Creator: California Shipbuilding Corporation

Physical Description: 0.42 linear feet

Language of Materials: English

Repository: Urban Archives

Abstract: The California Shipbuilding Corporation (CalShip), established in February 1941 on Terminal Island, became one of the focal points in Los Angeles' war effort. At CalShip, forty thousand men and women worked under war contracts to produce 467 vessels in four years. Known as the "Liberty Fleet," these cargo ships were designed to be constructed faster and less expensively than traditional cargo ships. The CalShip shipyard closed in September 1945 after the launching of its last Victory ship, "four years to the minute after the first slid into the water." The collection is comprised of fifty-one copies of the bi-weekly magazine, *CalShip Log*, for the period September 1, 1941 to January 11, 1945.

Historical Note:

The California Shipbuilding Corporation (CalShip), established in February 1941 on Terminal Island, became one of the focal points in Los Angeles' war effort. With the United States' entry into World War II, shipbuilding turned from a small industry into an industrial giant up and down the West Coast. Large Navy contracts brought port expansion and shipbuilding to California, and shipyards sprang up from San Francisco to San Diego. Under contracts from the U.S. Department of Maritime Commission and a number of U.S. Navy contracts, Los Angeles engaged in a thriving shipbuilding business in the early 1940s. Workers from every region of the United States migrated to the area for work in the shipyards and the docks of California. As a result, at the peak of shipbuilding in California, the industry employed over 282,000 people. Shipbuilding became a highly efficient wartime industry in California, employing laborers dedicated to quality and expediency in their work. The building of ships and the number of jobs in the industry peaked in mid-1943 and held together well until the end of the war.

CalShip was constructed on artificial earth supported by 57,000 piles. The property selected for the construction of the shipyard was the marshy, weed infested land of Terminal Island. Original plans for the building of the shipyard called for eight shipways and six outfitting docks to be constructed. But, because of the tremendous demand for ships that the war had created, the building program was expanded. The result was the construction of fourteen shipways and ten outfitting docks. The cost of construction was over \$11,000,000.

CalShip's first completed cargo ship was the S.S. John C. Fremont, launched 27 September 1941. 7,800 workers completed the ship more than a month ahead of schedule (it had taken only four months to build) and a great ceremony marked the event. On the day of its launching, fourteen other merchant ships were also launched, seven from the Atlantic Coast, six from the Pacific Coast, and one from the Gulf. It was the first "mass launching" of ships since World War I.

At CalShip, forty thousand men and women worked under war contracts to produce 467 vessels in four years. Known as the "Liberty Fleet," these cargo ships were designed to be constructed faster and less expensively than traditional cargo ships. "Part of the [Liberty] ship was pre-fabricated, and its parts were welded together instead of riveted, which cut construction time in half." This was a much quicker way to build ships, and by 1943, construction of one of these vessels took less than 60 days. The Liberty Ships were an important element in supplying armed forces overseas with materiel so desperately needed for combat operations. While originally designed as a cargo ship only, they were later modified to carry personnel overseas as well. "Liberty Ships accounted for about half of all cargo ships produced during the war."

After the end of the war, the Maritime Commission and the Navy department began canceling their contracts and the shipbuilding industry rapidly fell to the wayside. The CalShip shipyard closed in September 1945 after the launching of its last Victory ship, "four years to the minute after the first slid into the water."

Access Terms

This Collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Corporate Name:

California Shipbuilding Corporation

Liberty (Ship)

United States. Maritime Commission.

Victory (Ship)

Genre/Form of Material:

Publications

Geographic Name:

Terminal Island (Calif.)

Topical Term:

Defense contracts -- California

Employees' magazines, newsletters, etc. -- California -- Los Angeles

Shipbuilding contracts -- California -- Los Angeles

Shipbuilding industry -- California -- Los Angeles

Ships -- Welding

Shipyards -- California -- Los Angeles

World War, 1939-1945 -- California

World War, 1939-1945 -- Civilians

World War, 1939-1945 -- Manpower -- California -- Los Angeles

World War, 1939-1945 -- Women -- California -- Los Angeles

Processing Information:

Robert G. Marshall, September 1985

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Conditions Governing Access:

The collection is open for research use.

Preferred Citation:

For information about citing items in this collection consult the appropriate style manual, or see the [Citing Archival Materials](#) guide.

[Charles T. Lewis California Shipbuilding Corporation Collection](#)

Scope and Contents

The collection is comprised of fifty-one copies of the bi-weekly magazine, *CalShip Log*, for the period September 1, 1941 to January 11, 1945. Aimed at the employees of CalShip, its purpose was to inform workers of safety rules, policies and procedures and the progress of working for the war effort. The magazine includes a section on employee leisure activities. Also included in this small collection is a copy of the 1942 issue of *CalShip Cavalcade*, which pictorially details the transition of swampland into the Terminal Island shipyard, one newspaper clipping on the closing of the shipyard in September 1945, and a Labor Day "Victory" program for 1942.

Box 1

Folder 1	Calship Cavalcade (issue), 1942
Folder 2	Calship Log, 1941 September 1-December 15
Folder 3	Calship Log, 1942 January 1-December 15
Folder 4	Calship Log, 1943 January 15-December 1
Folder 5	Calship Log, 1944 January 15-November 15
Folder 6	Calship Log, 1945 January 11
Folder 7	Newspaper clipping: "Calship Becomes Ghost Yard After Last Vessel Launched," 1945 September 28
Folder 8	"Ships for Victory" Labor Day program, 1942 September 7