Finding aid to the Western Furniture Exchange and Merchandise Mart Records
1915-2008 SFH 475

Finding aid prepared by Katherine Ets-Hokin.
San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library
2018
100 Larkin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
sfhistory@sfpl.org
URL: http://www.sfpl.org/sfhistory
Title: Western Furniture Exchange and Merchandise Mart Records
Date (bulk): 1922-2008
Identifier/Call Number: SFH 475
Creator: Western Furniture Exchange and Merchandise Mart (San Francisco, Calif.)
Creator: San Francisco Mart
Physical Description: 29 cartons, 27 bully boxes, 4 pamphlet boxes, 1 flat file. (39.5 Cubic Feet)
Contributing Institution: San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library
100 Larkin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 557-4567
info@sfpl.org
Abstract: The Western Furniture Exchange and Merchandise Mart operated from its founding in 1915 until it closed in 2008. The Mart served as the largest hub for furniture wholesale on the West Coast and hosted sellers from all over the Western United States.
Physical Location: The collection is stored offsite.
Language of Material: English
Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English.
Conditions Governing Access
The collection is available for use during San Francisco History Center hours, with photographs available during Photo Desk hours. Collections that are stored offsite should be requested 48 hours in advance.
Publication Rights
All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the City Archivist. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the San Francisco Public Library as the owner of the physical items. All requests for permission to publish from photographs must be submitted in writing to the Photo Curator. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the San Francisco Public Library as the owner of the physical items.
Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Western Furniture Exchange and Merchandise Mart Records (SFH 475), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
Provenance
Donated by Manuel Perez of the Western Furniture Mart April 29, 2011.
Conservation Note
During processing, the entire collection was rehoused into acid free boxes and weeded for duplicate materials.
Administrative History
The Western Furniture Exchange and Merchandise Mart, or the San Francisco Furniture Mart as it was commonly called, operated from its founding in 1915 until its closing in 2008 when the bulk of western wholesale furniture markets concentrated in Las Vegas. At its apex the Mart operated as the largest hub for wholesale furniture on the West Coast and hosted sellers from all over the Western United States. It eventually grew to support seven markets under one roof with showrooms ranging from 400 to 1500 square feet. It sold items as varied as furniture, floor coverings, radio and television appliances, giftware, lamps, housewares, decorative textiles, linens, toys and juvenile goods. Semiannual and Friday marts operated on a membership basis with two market weeks a year, one in January and the second in July.
What would become known as the most recent Furniture Mart building was constructed in 1937 with floors added in 1948, 1957, and 1963. It continued to grow with new construction when Mart 2 opened next door in 1975. The Mart campus extended for an entire block of Market Street between 9th and 10th streets occupying 1.5 million square feet. Containing a barbershop, bank, post office, bar, restaurant, newsstand and radio station the Mart provided everything its customers needed.
Designed exclusively for wholesale business the Mart required buyers to maintain a membership and restricted the general public from showroom display areas. Membership required a place of business (other than a home), an established line of credit with three tenants (or firms) operating at the Mart, and recognition "as a stocking dealer" meaning one who stocked merchandise to sell to the public.
The Market Street campus is currently owned by Shorenstein Properties and has been occupied by Twitter Inc. since 2012.
Scope and Content
The Western Furniture Exchange and Merchandise Mart operated from its creation in 1915 until its closing in 2008. During its apex the Mart operated as the largest hub for furniture wholesale on the West Coast and hosted sellers from all over the Western United States.

The collection consists of publications produced by the Mart, scrapbooks assembled by date (scrapbooks contain ephemera and clippings relating to the Mart), and graphic materials including floor plans, photos, negatives, slides, sketches and a promotional video. Of note are the yearly Buyers Guide and Directories which list individual showrooms and wholesalers. The collection also includes a small amount of correspondence, a switchboard operator’s phone directory and an embossing stamp with the SF Furniture Mart logo. The collection does not contain Mart organizational information, staff or business records. Instead the collection content focuses on the sellers who operated in the Mart.

Photos include portraits, early scenes including the Mart’s first location at 180 Montgomery Street (circa 1915), advertising, construction, earthquake (1906), events, exteriors, interiors, Mart 2 opening (1975), Mart fire (1970), Marts other than San Francisco, and publicity shots.

**Arrangement**


**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

- Furniture industry and trade--United States--Catalogs.
- Furniture industry and trade--United States--Directories.
- Furniture industry and trade--United States--History.
- Wholesale trade -- California -- San Francisco -- Directories.
- Buildings -- Merchandise Mart.

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Series 3 Publications / Promotion

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Series 4 Scrapbooks, Clippings, and Ephemera

Scope and Contents

Scrapbooks contain brochures, flyers, newspaper and magazine clippings related to the Mart. Scrapbooks were compiled annually or seasonally. Binding style changed over time until eventually no binding was used at all. Scrapbooks and files are sorted chronologically within each box. Scrapbooks remain in original binding and loose materials are stored in files.

Scrapbooks 1932-1999

Scope and Contents

Scrapbooks remain in original binding and are arranged chronologically.

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Clippings, Brochures, Promotional Materials circa 1980-2008
Scope and Contents
Substance is similar to scrapbook contents, including clippings, brochures, pamphlets and promotional materials.

box 8, folder 1-16 1990-2000
box 9, folder 1-32 1980-2008

Series 5 Graphic Materials

 oversize-folder 1  
 Floor Plans Over-sized folder 1
Scope and Contents
Floor plans illustrating showroom locations and retailers.

Negatives circa 1915-circa 2000 1940s-1990s
Scope and Contents
Negatives match up loosely with the collection photographs.

box 49, folder 1  
 Events. Portraits
box 49, folder 2-3  
 Exteriors, Interiors, Advertising/Products Circa 1915-2010
box 49, folder 4  
 Events Circa 1990
box 49, folder 5  
 Portraits Circa 1990
box 49, folder 6  
 Portraits. Ivan & Mr. Rodgers Circa 1980
box 49, folder 7  
 San Francisco Chronicle 1921

CD-R
box 7, folder 17  
 After Midnight Branding, Central Market Payroll, Civic Center Community Benefit District, Market Street Right Turn Study (CD-R) circa 1990

Photographs 1906-circa 2008
box 48, folder 1  
 Advertising 1960s, 1990s
box 48, folder 2  
 Construction 1936, 1946, 1960s, 1970s
box 48, folder 3  
 Earthquake 1906
box 48, folder 4-8  
 Events Circa 1960-Circa 1990
box 48, folder 9  
box 48, folder 10  
 Events. San Francisco Mart 1990
box 48, folder 11  
 Events. SF Mart Hawaiian Trade Show 1993
box 48, folder 12-13  
 Events. Summer Market 1989, 1992
box 48, folder 14  
 Events. Winter Market 1990
box 48, folder 15-16  
 Exteriors 1940s-1960s
box 48, folder 17-20  
 Interiors 1950s-1990
box 48, folder 21  
 Mart Fire 1970
box 48, folder 22-23  
 Mart 2 Circa 1980
box 48, folder 24  
 Old Mart Before 1940
box 48, folder 25-26  
 Other Markets, not San Francisco Mart 1950s
box 48, folder 26-27  
 Portraits. Groups Circa 1950-Circa 1990
Portraits. Individuals Circa 1950-Circa 1990

Scope and Contents
Portraits include images of: Neil Forney (Bryant-Forney), Stanley Abercrombie ("Interior Design" magazine), Ted Balastieri (Restaurant Central), William Beebe (Pont de Nemours), E.L. Briggs Jr. (SFMA), William R. Bruener (John Bruener), Gary Drucher (Macy's), Neil Forney (SEM.WM), John F. Lawhon (Author), Rick A. Richards (Richards Marketing), James E. Mulden (Brody Seating), Steven McLead (Mand Carpet Mill), Ron Martino (Martino Complete Home Furnishing), Robert R. Rogers, Paul Primrose & Lansing Brown (Ozite), George T. Rockrise, Robert Mitchell & Richard Bohrer (Carpet Mills), John G. Veneman (Assemblyman), Richard E. Whalley (Jackson Firm), T. G. Vaughan, Jr. (Vogh An Furniture), Milo Baughman (Milo Baughman Design), Joe LaCognata, Warner S. McDonell (Rembrendt Lambo), Ralph Levitz (Letvitz), W. Boggs (Bever Carpert), Kenneth L. Booth, Bill Richmond (Furtorian), Penetizio (Marbetui), S. G. "Jerry" Nerland & John Richards (Vox), M. Wallace Rubin (Home Furnishings Council), Bruce Roberts (Eastman), Benno G. Rothschild (David Rothschild), William S. Richman (Stratford Company), Frank J. Vance (Bigelow-Sanford), John Fatzick (Occacinal), Laurie J. Reiners (Target Systems), David T. Floherty (Broyhill), Alan Fuikel (Suncraft of California), Peter B. Faust (Burwood), Joseph T. Frye & Joseph T. Frye Jr (Athens Bed), Bill Linsled (USSI), Dan R. Frank (Permaneer), Howard Olausky, Jim Cowen (Cowen & Lavelle), Robert A. McKenzie (Jropitone), D.J. "Joe" Dewsmond (Retailers Marketing Guild), Gordon J. Peplin, Donald W. Mitchell, & Joe B. Maffett (WestPoint Pepperell Carpet & Rug) Robert L. Ficks, Jr. (Bauritter), Henry Foscue (Southern Furniture Exposition Building , Globe Furniture), Joseph Sinay (State College United, Josam), James Van Vleck (Stanley Firm), Bill Peterson (Furniture Today), Bill Cumbelich (Coldwell Banker), Leon Rosenthal (Sloane), Kenneth L. Booth (Ward Firm), Cliff Weitz (Bauman-Weitz), Fred Pedersen Jr (Pedersen's), "Senior O." Lindler, Sam Mortes (Calstrga), No Name (American Firm Association), C.E. "Cliff" Rice III (Basic-Witz), Lewis B. Miller (The United States Bedhifo), Schacter, Jack Redwood (Redwood Rasr), Ernest E. Warsaw (Sheffuld Chair), Robert Fogury Jr. (Virtue), Harold A. Leed Jr (Moore Furniture), Peter Funston (Harris of Caez), F.E. "Mike" Masiw (C. Lt. Masland & Sons), Mrs. Leekolker, Willian D' Elia (business development consultant), John Raeber (author), Paul E. Rumbaeyh (Prueble), Roger W. Fiarley (Stanler Furniture), Orvis Bryaur (Western Merchandiser).

Portraits. Gennet, Michael (President) Circa 1980

Portraits. Moore, Harry (President) Circa 1940

Portraits. Preiser, Donald (President) Circa 1990

Portraits. Rogers, Leonard (President) Circa 1980

Portraits. Runyan, Frank (President) 1965

Portraits. Unidentified Circa 1980-Circa 1990

Slides circa 1990-circa 2008

Scope and Contents
Slides include exteriors, merchandise, and events.

Advertising Circa 1990

Events Circa 1990

Exteriors Circa 1990

Merchandise Circa 1990

Promotional Video circa 1990

Scope and Contents
Video contains discussion from Bruce Mosler (Chairman of the Board) and Jean Anderson Covarelli (Principal Purchasing Connection) discussing remodeling and rebranding, Art Gensler (Gensler & Associates Architects, and Ray Kennedy (ASID).

Series 6 Artifacts

Logo Embossing Stamp circa 1990