
Rogers Locomotive Company letterpress correspondence books

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2020

Descriptive Summary

Title: Rogers Locomotive Company letterpress correspondence books

Dates: 1900

Collection Number: MS 535

Creator/Collector: Rogers Locomotive Company

Extent: 1 oversize box

Repository: California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives
Sacramento, California 95814

Abstract: Two letterpress copybooks date from the final years of the esteemed Rogers Locomotive Company. Each contains the correspondence of R. Wells, Superintendent, G. H. Longbottom, Secretary and President, and G. E. Hannah, Secretary. The letters are directed to the purchasing agents of various railroads and discuss, often in great detail, steam locomotive orders placed with Rogers. There is also correspondence with the suppliers of materials to this noted locomotive builder. There is an index to correspondents in each volume.

Language of Material: English

Access

This collection is open for research at our off-site storage facility with one week's notice. Contact Library & Archives staff to arrange for access.

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Preferred Citation

Rogers Locomotive Company letterpress correspondence books. California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives

Acquisition Information

Gift of David Sherman, 2002

Biography/Administrative History

"Rogers Locomotive Works, Paterson, New Jersey, was one of the most important locomotive producers in this country in terms of technical improvements and productivity. This shop helped introduce such design reforms as spread-leading trucks, wagon-top boilers and link-motion valve gears. Between 1837 and 1913 it produced nearly 6,200 locomotives. •For most of its existence, it was owned and operated as a family business. Thomas Rogers (1792-1856) opened his own machine shop early in 1832 with the backing of two New York financiers, Jasper Grosvenor and Morris Ketchum. In 1837 Roger produced his first locomotive, the "Sandusky." By January 1840 he produced his 20th engine. ... Rogers' reputation for advanced design brought him many customers and soon he was among the best patronized suppliers in the trade. •Rogers' death in 1856 did not slow the upward progress of the firm, which was then renamed the Rogers Locomotive and Machine Company. Early in 1860 the plant turned out its 900th engine and was the third largest locomotive shop in terms of total production. After Norris closed in 1866, Rogers was second only to Baldwin and was to maintain this position for many years. ...During the 1880s Rogers turned out around 170 locomotives a year. Rogers employed 1,700 men. Total production reached 4,200 in early 1890. •Yet it was losing its number two position to Schenectady. At the same time, its main rival, Baldwin, was greatly outproducing everyone else engaged in railway engine construction. Jacob S. Rogers, the only son of Thomas Rogers, showed less interest in the day-to-day operations of the plant and resigned as President in 1893. The business was then reorganized as the Rogers Locomotive Works with its longtime treasurer, Robert S. Hughes, as president. When Hughes died in 1899, Rogers was still the major stockholder and panicked at the thought of reassuming the burdens of business management. He ordered the plant closed late the following year. •It remained idle for some months until new owners could be found. A new building was added to the complex and Wells was retained as superintendent, but Rogers was totally dwarfed by Baldwin and the newly formed American Locomotive Company. It would survive as an independent for only another four years, when it too was swallowed by Alco. •The new and final owners felt that two shops in Paterson were one too many. Rogers was not only obsolete but it had no direct rail connection for the shipment of new engines. ... Almost no heavy locomotives were produced at the Rogers plant after early 1908. Light contractors and export locomotives were manufactured along with steam shovels and rotary snow plows. The planned shifting of tools and personnel to the newer, suburban Cooke plant took place after the final engine was turned out in the Rogers plant in the summer of 1913. In 1915 the old Rogers corporation was dissolved." John H. White, A SHORT HISTORY

OF AMERICAN LOCOMOTIVE BUILDERS IN THE STEAM ERA (1982), pp. 87-89.

Scope and Content of Collection

Two letterpress copybooks date from the final years of the esteemed Rogers Locomotive Company. Each contains the correspondence of R. Wells, Superintendent, G. H. Longbottom, Secretary and President, and G. E. Hannah, Secretary. The letters are directed to the purchasing agents of various railroads and discuss, often in great detail, steam locomotive orders placed with Rogers. There is also correspondence with the suppliers of materials to this noted locomotive builder. There is an index to correspondents in each volume.
