Shuster Aerial Photograph Collection

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Humboldt State University Library
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2018
**Descriptive Summary**

**Title:** Shuster Aerial Photograph Collection

**Dates:** 1946-1968

**Collection Number:** 2001.01

**Creator/Collector:** Merle Shuster

**Extent:** 3 cubic feet; approximately 2400 items

Online items available [http://library.humboldt.edu/humco/holdings/shuster.htm](http://library.humboldt.edu/humco/holdings/shuster.htm)

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**Abstract:** Between 1946 and the mid 1960s Merle Shuster was hired by land developers, timber owners, and lumber mill owners to photograph specific sites. Approximately half the images in the collection come from these assignments and the other half are what Mr. Shuster chose to photograph as he was flying to and from the designated site. Most of the images are taken at an oblique angle, giving the viewer a richer sense of the landscape. Scenes from the burgeoning post-war lumber industry on Humboldt Bay and nearby coastal areas form the majority of the collection. Other scenes include rivers, country roads and farmsteads, small towns, and stunning landscapes. Humboldt Bay, Eureka, Arcata, Trinidad, and Crescent City are particularly well documented.

**Language of Material:** English

**Access**
The collection is open for research.

**Publication Rights**
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**Preferred Citation**
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**Acquisition Information**
Merle Shuster donated the aerial photograph collection to Humboldt State University Library in 2001.

**Biography/Administrative History**
Merle Shuster's interest in photography started when he was in high school. After he graduated from Eureka High School he attended Humboldt State College for two years and then joined the United States Navy for two years. In the Navy Merle received intensive training in photography, including aerial photography. Upon his discharge in 1945 Merle returned to Eureka and took a job at Photo Specialty Shop. He worked there from 1946 until 1960. Merle also gained photograph experience by working at Swanlund Studio and Camera Shop. Merle started his own photography business and by late 1946 was taking on assignments in aerial work as well as special occasions, such as weddings. His friend and fellow photographer, Jack Phegley, encouraged him and sold him the military surplus aerial cameras that Merle used throughout his career. Merle was a member of the American Association of Aerial Photographers. In 1960 Merle took over the management of Philip's Camera Shop in Arcata while the owner was away for a year. Next he worked at the Humboldt Market grocery store in Eureka for four years, then he was at Proctor's Photographic Engineering Center for two or three years. During all this time he continued his photography business. From 1969 until he retired in 1991 Merle worked for Channel 6 television station in Eureka. Over the years Merle has generously shared his images with researchers and publishers. Many of them have been published in a wide assortment of reports and publications. Merle used three cameras in his aerial work, but it was the F-8 that produced the 5x7 negatives that make up the majority of the collection. The other cameras are a K-24 and a 4x5 Speed Graphic. Merle's sister, Evelyn Shuster Worthen, wrote about some aspects of the Shuster family history in a book titled, A Castle in Fairyland and other stories of The Carson Family and their Mansions.

**Scope and Content of Collection**
This photographic collection is comprised of 2313 images: 2248 negatives and 65 prints with no accompanying negative. Mr. Shuster's master index contained entries for 2463 items so the database created for the collection has 2463 records. There are 148 records in the database for which, at this time, we have neither a negative nor a print. There are contact prints and/or 8"x10" prints for approximately 15% of the collection. There are about 15 ground level images, the rest are aerial and were taken from a wide range of altitudes. Merle Shuster was hired by land developers and lumber mill or timberland owners to photograph specific sites. Approximately half the images in the collection come from these assignments and the other half are what Mr. Shuster chose to photograph. As Mr. Shuster was flown to and from his destinations he would take photos of many of the scenes passing below. Most of the images are taken at an oblique angle,
giving viewers a more detailed look at the landscape. Scenes from the burgeoning post-war lumber industry (mills, log ponds, timberlands, ships), Eureka, Arcata, new housing subdivisions, Humboldt Bay and the waterfronts of Eureka and the Samoa area form the backbone of the collection. Other scenes include rivers, farmsteads, small towns, and stunning landscapes.

**Indexing Terms**
Humboldt County
Humboldt Bay
Eureka
Arcata
lumbering
forests and forestry
transportation
aerial photography
housing
land use

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