A guide to the John R. Lyman papers, 1939-1978

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park
Building E, Fort Mason
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: 415-561-7030
Fax: 415-556-3540
SAFR_Historic_Documents@nps.gov
URL: http://www.nps.gov/safr
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Title: John R. Lyman papers  
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Creator: Lyman, John R.  
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Building E, Fort Mason  
San Francisco, CA 94123  
Abstract: Approximately 133 linear feet including folders of textual materials, photographs, index card file drawers, oversize foldered items, scrapbooks, and other bound items.  
Physical Location: San Francisco Maritime NHP, Historic Documents Department  
Language(s): In English.  
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Transferred from Golden Gate National Recreation Area to San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park in 1988.  
Historical or Biographical Note  
John Rowen Lyman was born in Berkeley, California on October 28, 1915. While still a youngster he became interested in the lore and history of the sea, partly because of his easy access to the remains of vessels that could still be found around the Bay Area.  
As Karl Kortum of the San Francisco Maritime Museum recalled: "Here they were -- palpable -- four-masted barks, iron and steel full-rigged ships, schooners and barkentines in the ship graveyards of San Francisco Bay. This was in the early 1930s. The graveyards were in Oakland Estuary, on the San Joaquin river at Antioch, California (chosen for wooden ships because salt water didn't reach that far and so ship worms died), and Richardson's Bay, off Sausalito. There were a dozen tattered square-riggers to be found and an equal number of fore-and-afters. San Francisco was the last large registering-place of American sail ..."  
Lyman attended the University of California, Berkeley, from 1932 to 1936 and graduated with a B.S. degree in chemistry. While still an undergraduate, he began publishing articles in the British journal Sea Breezes. Soon after taking his degree,
he became a graduate student and research assistant at the University of California's Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla. There he did research on the chemistry of sea water and also went to sea on the 106-foot schooner E W SCRIPPS, collecting sea water samples and data on currents and marine organisms. He also began working up a list of all the sailing vessels built on the Pacific Coast between 1855 and 1905. Lyman recalled, in the Nautical Research Guild Secretary's Monthly Letter, February 1950, that this work was published in Americana and that it formed the basis for the first of his well-known lists published in Marine Digest.

In 1940, motivated by the fall of Norway to Nazi invaders, Lyman sought a commission in the United States Navy, which offered commissions to qualified specialists in oceanographic instruments. In April 1941 he was commissioned as an ensign and sent to the Naval Proving Ground at Dahlgren, Virginia. He remained in the Navy and the Naval Reserve until he retired, with the rank of captain, in 1973.

During the war Lyman served on the original editorial board of the American Neptune, a journal with which he would have a long and fruitful relationship. He also published the first of six series of exhaustively compiled, definitive lists of ship biographies that came to be known as the "Lyman Lists." Appearing in the Seattle trade journal Marine Digest between 1941 and 1945, the titles of the lists reflect Lyman's intense interest in the then-looked subject of West Coast maritime history:

"Pacific Coast Built Sailers, 1850-1905"

"Pacific Coast Owned Sailers That Were Built Elsewhere 1905-1940"
"Pacific Coast Built Sailers of World War I 1916-1920"
"Pacific Coast Wooden Steam Schooners, 1884-1924"
"Steel Steam Schooners of the Pacific Coast, Summarized by Shipyards"
"Wooden Steamers of World War I"

The publication of a seventh series, "Pacific Sealing Fleet" in Marine Digest, actually Lyman's completion of raw materials provided by R. N. D'Armond, was suspended in 1950 when Lyman found himself too busy with the publication of his own periodical, Log Chips.

Lieutenant Commander Lyman was involved in two significant postwar projects for the government. In 1946, he did ordnance intelligence work for the U.S. Naval Technical Mission to Japan, and directed the oceanographic program of Joint Task Force One at the Bikini atomic bomb tests. Soon afterward, he separated from active duty and joined the Division of Oceanography in the U.S. Navy Hydrographic Office. By 1950 he had advanced to Deputy Director. He went on to lead programs in oceanography at the National Science Foundation (1961-1964), the Department of Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries (1964-1966), and to serve as a civilian consultant to UNESCO and the Naval Research Laboratory (1966-1968).

In 1968 Dr. Lyman went to Chapel Hill to head the Office of Marine Sciences at the Consolidated University of North Carolina; he held dual professorships at UNC-Chapel Hill and NCSU-Raleigh. Following his retirement in 1973, he served as a consultant to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on reactor site selection. During this period, he continued to lend his efforts to the support of maritime history.

If the "Lyman Lists" and his regular contributions to such journals as Sea Breezes, Mariner's Mirror, American Neptune and U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings established John Lyman's reputation as an authority in the field of maritime history, then his periodical Log Chips brought that reputation into the realm of legend. The full run consisted of 44 issues, released on a bimonthly schedule between July 1948 and January 1953, quarterly until the April/July 1955 issue, and thereafter on an irregular schedule until its final issue (volume 4, number 8) in 1959. The periodical was written mostly by Lyman. He and his wife Mitchell mimeographed and sent it to subscribers worldwide. Log Chips served primarily as a publishing outlet for Lyman's own research and that of his many correspondents and, in his own words, "observations and notes for which no suitable medium of publication at present exists." Lyman's production and distribution of Log Chips also functioned as an early means of networking in the absence of national or international organizations for maritime historians. In addition to subject articles on ships and shipbuilders, bibliographies and reviews, every issue of Log Chips featured Lyman's lists, most combined with historical sketches. Subjects included "Six-masted schooners built on the East Coast"; "United Kingdom shipbuilding 1875-1921," "Square-riggers built in the U.S. 1870-1920," "Four-masted schooners built on the Pacific Coast," and lists for various shipbuilders on Humboldt Bay, San Francisco Bay, districts in Washington, Oregon, Maine, Long Island, Chesapeake Bay, the Gulf Coast, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Denmark. Most maritime libraries holding runs of Log Chips report that, nearly fifty years after publication, Lyman's journal usually ranks among the most frequently used items.

John Lyman's achievement in maritime history is particularly notable because, like most of his colleagues, Lyman worked regular jobs in the Navy and later in academia. He also obtained his advanced degrees in Oceanography (M.S., 1951; Ph.D., 1958) from Scripps while pursuing his avocation. Even working full-time and producing Log Chips, he was able to publish a
dozen or more articles a year, a pace that increased after his retirement. Lyman also continued to publish work in oceanographic and linguistic journals and to consult and serve on the boards of various maritime societies and preservation projects. He continued to pursue his interests and build collections in maritime history and technology, linguistics, sea chanteyes, the history and lore of flags, and the genealogy of the Lyman family. While Dr. Lyman usually described these activities as merely a way of filling his free time, Karl Kortum summarized the value of his work when he observed, "We have been benefiting from a scientist's mind -- educated, reaching, retentive, analytical -- and we've been lucky that sailing ship history is the 'sideline' it chose."

He was a founding trustee and later advisor to the National Maritime Society, and an organizer and council member of the North American Society for Oceanic History, which annually offers the John R. Lyman Book Award in his memory.

John Lyman had wed in 1936, but that marriage was dissolved nine years later. In May 1946, he married Mitchell Forrest; the thirty-one year union produced two sons, John Forrest Wilson Lyman, born in 1950, and Richard Donald McKay Lyman, born in 1956.

On November 17, 1977, John Rowen Lyman died. A portion of his ashes was scattered on the waters of the Pacific Ocean. He was eulogized by the president of the University of North Carolina as one of America's distinguished scientists, but Harold Huycke effectively captured the encompassing nature of John Lyman's work:

"The primary work of preserving the Pacific Coast shipbuilding and shipping history must be credited to John Lyman, who saw a need and filled it. Whatever work is done after this, if it touches upon shipbuilders, ship-owners and the wooden ships themselves, will only be possible because of the first ground-swell of research, begun in the 1930's when John Lyman prowled the quiet waters of Oakland Creek and saw what he believed was the end of an era. In saving the names and the story of this broad coastline, and its century old shipping history, he surely must be remembered and honored as one of America's outstanding maritime scholars and historians."

**Collection Scope and Content**

Approximately 133 linear feet including folders of textual materials, photographs, index card file drawers, oversize foldered items, scrapbooks, and other bound items.

Most of these materials were received in September 1978 as loose papers, folders, loose-leaf notebooks, and published materials, piled in cartons, with only a very general arrangement system in effect. The papers were transferred from the Lyman residence in Chapel Hill, North Carolina at the same time as Dr. Lyman's private library holdings, and were placed in twenty-five cartons exactly as found in filing cabinets and in stacks about his study. The index card files were shipped in their original drawers; photographs and oversize materials were housed separately for shipment and interim storage.

**Collection Arrangement**

John Lyman's papers may be grouped intellectually by function and form into six series. At this time the papers have not been physically rearranged. The current physical arrangement, which reflects the arrangement as unpacked is found in section of the finding aid, "Container List by Folder Number." The intellectual arrangement is found in the section of the finding aid "Container List by Series Title."

**Series 1 Correspondence and research files** consist of 249 folders containing incoming (originals, carbon copies, photocopies) and outgoing (carbons) correspondence, lists, notes, photocopied items, mailings, ephemera, draft manuscripts, photographs, brochures, reprints and clippings. Though these files are primarily correspondence, they were evidently kept by their creator as active working files and thus contain other forms such as draft manuscripts, notes, clippings and some photographs. The two alphabetical correspondence subseries collected here in folders 164-206 and 231-269 evidently represent discrete record keeping sequences.

Subseries: Alphabetical correspondence files (bulk dates 1940s-1950s) (folders 164-206) are arranged by individual or institutional correspondent name. This subseries appears to have been created for more personal or casual correspondence, though some items which would be expected in the "Correspondence II" subseries appear here, such as a number of exchanges between Lyman and Sea Breezes filed under "S." Also, the date range is not absolute: folders 188, 193, and 194 contain some items from the 1930s.

Subseries: "Correspondence files II" (bulk dates 1930s-1950s) (folders 231-269) are arranged by individual or institutional correspondent name. This subseries contains more draft manuscript items, and apparently was created to keep correspondence with publishers or publishing colleagues or which dealt with issues of publication. Folder 235, "Marine Digest," is filed under "C" for the founding editor of that magazine, Jackson Corbet. As with the previous subseries, the date range is loosely defined: correspondence in folders 255 and 256 does not end at 1959; Dr. Lyman filed correspondence with Mariner's Mirror here until the year of his death.

**Series 2 Subject files** consist of 566 folders containing publications, reports, brochures, reprints, clippings, photocopied or transcribed documents, notes, lists, subject correspondence, index cards and other materials generated by Dr. Lyman or his correspondents, dealing with general or specific topics and used by him as reference sources, subject-based files during...
the course of a project, or to mark topics for further research. These files appear to have been the first phase in Dr. Lyman’s “paper database”: they were repositories for topical materials, and his index cards appear to have been generated from the information collected here. In fact, a distinguishing feature of these subject files is the large number of handwritten lists and in-progress or to-be-filed index cards that are found.

Subseries: Subject correspondence (folders 282-588) were evidently found in Dr. Lyman's roughly alphabetical arrangement according to topic. For the most part, these folders contain correspondence, draft lists, and other writings plus some collected items.

Subseries: Subject materials (folders 589-728) contain secondary materials; reports, corporate publications, press releases, clippings and other forms that were generated by government or corporate agencies, collected by Dr. Lyman and consulted by him in the course of his research and filed by him according to general subject headings.

Sub-subseries: Clippings (folders 1075-1102) contain newspaper and magazine clippings, some reprints of government publications and scholarly journals, with bulk dates of ca. 1940-45. The bulk of the materials are newspaper clippings, or articles from Life Magazine, Saturday Evening Post, Reader's Digest, and other popular magazines of the day. A folder list is appended after this document. This sub-series was located in materials separated from the main HDC collection as a photo collection.

Subseries: Subject Notebooks (folders 846, 848-856, 891-913, 915-919) contain handwritten and typed notes and transcriptions, drawings and photocopied items that were compiled in three-ring binders by Dr. Lyman according to specific projects.

Series 3 Index card files consisted of 66 card file drawers. Five drawers were empty. Index cards on individual vessels, shipbuilders, bibliographic references, word references/etymologies, chanteys, addresses, persons, names and other data. Begun by Dr. Lyman in the very early 1930s and expanded during the rest of his career, this series represents a paper “database” containing most of the elements of his varied research.

Subseries: Photographic negatives, 1930-1945. The contents of file drawer #1048 containing approximately 570 nitrate photographic negatives (4-3/4” x 2-3/4”, or 12cm x 7 cm) and some small black & white prints were removed and rehoused. The images were created by Dr. Lyman between the early 1930s and the mid-1940s, and are interfiled with index cards containing Dr. Lyman's notes on the subjects and circumstances of their creation. Since they formed a part of Dr. Lyman's "paper database", the index card files have been maintained here as a component of that series.

Series 4 Manuscripts are contained in approximately 145 folders, and consist of original, carbon copies and photocopied manuscripts and drafts of typed and handwritten articles, reports, book chapters, autobiographies, lists, notes, traced illustrations, sheet music and diaries. Unless otherwise noted in the inventory, manuscripts are by Dr. Lyman. Manuscripts attributable to persons other than Dr. Lyman have been so identified, and those items where authorship is unknown are thus labeled.

Subseries: Manuscripts by Lyman (folders 6, 119, 150, 154, 273-276, 280, 348, 438, 734, 737-740, 747, 750, 756, 759-760, 762-763, 767, 781, 785-786, 791, 793, 829-830, 832-833, 838-839, 943) consists of typed and handwritten drafts and fragments of writings by John Lyman which were kept in specifically named folders. Other manuscripts by Dr. Lyman are scattered throughout the papers.

Sub-subseries: Manuscript Notebooks (folders 847, 857-875, 878-890, 925-929, 963-967) contain in-progress manuscript materials which were kept in three-ring binders. Except for the contents of folder 847, which contains some college term papers and prototypes for some of Lyman's later articles and lists, most of this subseries dates from the early to mid-1970s. Dr. Lyman had retired in 1973, and evidently it was his intention to rework the data from some of the "Lyman Lists" into book-length manuscripts. As a result, this subseries contains both typed and handwritten manuscript materials and photocopied segments, sometimes entire pages, from some of the Log Chips lists.

Subseries: Manuscripts by others (folders 141, 152, 224-226, 270-272, 312, 729-730, 742-743, 761, 778-780, 781A-783, 792, 828, 834, 836, 841, 941-942, 944-961) consists of typed drafts and photocopied manuscripts of writings by persons other than John Lyman which were kept in specifically named folders. Other manuscript materials written by persons other than Dr. Lyman are scattered throughout the papers.

Series 5 Collected documents consist of mostly original items collected by Dr. Lyman. These are divided into two subseries according to form.

Subseries: Oversize collected documents (oversize folders 1-15) are plans, blueprints, data tables, maps, posters, prints, an oversize government document, drawings and paintings. Larger oversize collected documents are housed in oversize folders 1-8 in "B" or "C" flat file drawers. See the attached Marine Architectural Plans records inventory for more information on these items and their location. "AA" flat file drawer #3 contains seven folders (oversize folders 9-15) of oversize collected documents that do not require larger storage space; these are listed on pages 21 and 22 the documents inventory.
Subseries: Standard size collected documents are logbooks, journals, ledgers, cost books, blueprint books and government documents. These are housed mainly in flat boxes numbered 59, 60 and 61.

Series 6 Photographs, was made into a photograph collection and cataloged as P05-076, John R. Lyman photograph collection.