A Guide to the Robert Dollar and Robert S. Dollar business records

HDC0144

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, National Park Service

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Title: Robert Dollar and Robert S. Dollar business records
Date: 1913 - 1967
Identifier/Call Number: HDC0144 (SAFR 18468)
Creator: Dollar, Robert S.
Dollar, Robert, 1844-1932
Physical Description: 34.5 linear ft.
Repository: San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Historic Documents Department
Building E, Fort Mason
San Francisco, CA 94123
Abstract: Robert Dollar and Robert S. Dollar business records (SAFR 18468, HDC 144) includes primarily bills of lading, correspondence, stock certificate books, record books, minute books, logbooks, drawings as well as three family letters. The collections dates from 1913 to 1967. A more detailed finding aid is available through the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park Research Center. The collection is available for research use without restriction.
Physical Location: San Francisco Maritime NHP, Historic Documents Department
Language(s): In English.
Access
This collection is open for use unless otherwise noted.
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Processing Note
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Preferred Citation
[Item description], [Location within collection organization identified by Collection Number/Series Number/File Unit Number/Item Number], HDC0144 (SAFR 18468), Robert Dollar and Robert S. Dollar business records, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park
Acquisition Information
SAFR-00001
This collection was transferred from Golden Gate National Recreation Area to San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.
Historical or Biographical Note
Captain Robert Dollar (1844-1932) was born in Falkirk, Scotland. By the age of 11, he was earning his own living as a shore boy in a lumber camp in Canada, where he endured many hardships. Dollar’s difficult childhood likely shaped his stringent attitude toward life and work.
Robert Dollar purchased Usal Redwood Company on the Pacific coast, in 1894. Dollar Lumber Company was running out of timber for their Guerneville mill at the time. Unfortunately, shipping schedules at the time were erratic, and Dollar, like many in the lumber business at the time, found that he had little control over the transportation of his goods. In 1895, Dollar acquired his first vessel, a single steam schooner called NEWSBOY, to move his lumber from the Pacific Northwest to markets down the coast. This foray into shipping resulted in the founding of the Dollar Line in 1900, when Dollar was nearly
60 years old.

When Dollar made a test run to the Orient with another of his ships, he was the first to bring the lumber business to a new continent. Soon, the familiar Dollar Line smokestack, with its distinctive dollar symbol, was a familiar sight throughout Asia. As the result of his success, he encouraged leaders from different industries in the U.S. to explore Asia as a potential new market for their businesses. He was a pioneer in trans-Pacific trade in the 20th century.

By World War I, the Dollar Line was such an institution in Asia that his word alone was enough "collateral" to begin the construction of ships in China that cost 30 million dollars.

In 1923, the purchase of seven "President" ships owned by the U.S. government allowed Dollar, then age 80, to establish his successful round-the-world passenger service. In 1925, Dollar Line acquired the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and its trans-Pacific routes including the Admiral Oriental Line. Ultimately, Robert Dollar made eight circumnavigations of the world and over 40 trips to the Orient.

In 1929, two more President type ships were purchased as round-the-world-liners including the SS PRESIDENT GARFIELD. With the two new ships, the Dollar Line had the largest fleet of passenger and cargo liners operating under the U.S. flag. The company name changed to the Dollar Steamship Line Inc. Ltd.

By the late 1920s, Dollar passed the reins of management along to his son Robert Stanley, although he kept true to his work ethic and remained involved in the business right up to the end of his life. On May 16, 1932, Robert Dollar died at the age of 88.

The years after R. Stanley Dollar (1880-1958) assumed his father's role, the Dollar Line suffered from the Great Depression and the maritime labor strikes of 1934 and 1936. In 1938, the Line was so far in debt that it suspended operation. In August 1938, the Dollar line was taken over by the Federal Maritime Commission and the Line was renamed the American President Line.

The U.S. Government owned the American President Lines. The Dollar family attempted through legal means after World War II to recover the company but was unsuccessful. The line was sold and the money split between the Dollar family and the U.S. Government.

**Collection Scope and Content**

Robert Dollar and Robert S. Dollar business records (SAFR 18468, HDC 144) includes primarily bills of lading, correspondence, stock certificate books, record books, minute books, logbooks, drawings as well as three family letters. The collections dates from 1913 to 1967. A more detailed finding aid is available through the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park Research Center. The collection is available for research use without restriction.

**Collection Arrangement**

Arranged into three series: Series 1 - Bills of Lading by vessel name, 1924; Series 2 - Correspondence, business and miscellaneous, 1929 - 1946; Series 3 - Business Records includes receipts, minute books, logbook, typescripts, reports, legal briefs and memoranda.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Passenger vessels
Dollar, Robert, 1844-1932
Dollar, Robert S.
Dollar Steamship Lines
American President Lines, Ltd.
Bills of lading
Clippings
Cruise lines