A Guide to the Panama Mail Steamship Company operations receipts

HDC1644

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, National Park Service

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**Title:** Panama Mail Steamship Company operations receipts

**Date:** 1933

**Identifier/Call Number:** HDC1644 (SAFR 23142)

**Physical Description:** 544 items.

**Repository:** San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Historic Documents Department

Building E, Fort Mason
San Francisco, CA 94123

**Abstract:** Panama Mail Steamship Company operations receipts, 1933 (SAFR 23142, HDC 1644) is comprised of bills of sale and receipts from suppliers to Grace Line (W. R. Grace & Co.) and its subsidiary, Panama Mail Steamship Company. Most of the receipts are for items used on the passenger liners and note the name of the hull. Other bills of sale reflect oil and maintenance costs. The collection has been processed to the collection level and is open for use without restrictions.

**Physical Location:** San Francisco Maritime NHP, Historic Documents Department

**Language(s):** In English.

**Access**

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Please cite the title and collection number in any correspondence with our staff.

**Preferred Citation**

[Item description], [Location within collection organization identified by Collection Number/Series Number/File Unit Number/Item Number], HDC1644 (SAFR 23142), Panama Mail Steamship Company operations receipts, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

**Acquisition Information**

SAFR-02177

Originally donated from a corporate source.

**Historical or Biographical Note**

The Irish-born Grace brothers, William Russell and Michael, partnered with the firm of John Bryce and founded Grace Brothers & Co in Peru (headquartered in London) in the mid-19th century to serve as ship chandlers in the guano trade. In 1865, William left Michael in charge of their interests in Callao while he went to New York to establish W.R. Grace & Co. By 1880, William had been elected Mayor of New York City twice, and later that decade the company entered the steamship business with a line of freighters that ran from New York to the South American west coast flying the British flag. What later became the Grace Line began in 1882 as a line of sailing vessels that ran between Peru and New York. William established regular steamship service in 1893 with a subsidiary called the New York & Pacific Steamship Co., operating under the British flag. United States flag service began in 1912 with the Atlantic and Pacific Steamship Company. The activities of both companies and the parent firm were consolidated into the Grace Steamship Company, which began in 1916. The firm originally specialized in traffic to the west coast of South America and later expanded to the Caribbean.
In 1916, William decided to organize passenger service from New York to ports on the west coast of South America as far as Valparaiso, Chile. A decade later the secondary service from New York to as far as Antofagasta, Chile was begun. Also in 1916, the company acquired a controlling interest in the established Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the premiere west coast and transpacific operator.

In the 1920s, William formed a new entity, the Panama Mail Company, to operate the small ships formerly owned and used by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in the Central American trade. These ships were used to make runs between San Francisco and New York.

In the 1930s, the Grace Line established the first passenger service between New York and Seattle. Calls were made at Havana, Puerto Colombia, Cartagena, Canal Zone, Punta Arenas, La Libertad, San Jose, Mazatlan, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Victoria. In 1934 the port time in New York was greatly reduced and the call at Philadelphia eliminated. The time saved enabled the ships to make a popular shuttle run between Seattle and San Francisco.

In 1959, The Saint Lawrence Seaway opened and Grace Line obtained approval for an operational subsidy for the Great Lakes route. The route would serve ports on the Great Lakes to Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Barbados, and ports on the north coast of Venezuela and Colombia. The decision to operate to the Great Lakes proved to be a financial disaster for the company and the run was given up after one season.

In 1969, the parent company, W.R. Grace, decided to go out of the steamship business and concentrate on chemical and other ventures. Grace Line was sold to Prudential Line, a small line owned by Skouras of 20th Century Fox. At first the line was called Prudential Grace Lines and later the Grace was dropped and it became just Prudential Line.

At its height, the Grace Line was a major player in American merchant shipping. Shortly after World War II it owned 23 ships totaling 188,000 gross tons, plus 14 more on bareboat charters.

**Collection Scope and Content**

Panama Mail Steamship Company operations receipts, 1933 (SAFR 23142, HDC 1644) is comprised of bills of sale and receipts from suppliers to Grace Line (W. R. Grace & Co.) and its subsidiary, Panama Mail Steamship Company. Most of the receipts are for items used on the passenger liners and note the name of the hull. Other bills of sale reflect oil and maintenance costs. The collection has been processed to the collection level and is open for use without restrictions.

**Collection Arrangement**

Items arranged chronologically then alphabetically.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Administrative records
Grace Line
San Francisco (Calif.)
Receipts (Acknowledgments)
Financial records
Administrative records