Guide to Fox Movie Flash Street Photography Records

NMAH.AC.0853

by Erin Molloy.

2011
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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Creators: Fox Movie Flash
Rose, Bob
Selle, Joseph, 1906-1988

Title: Fox Movie Flash Street Photography Records

Dates: circa 1930-1975

Bulk Dates: 1945-1975

Quantity: 4 cubic feet (6 boxes)

Abstract: The collection documents the professional activities of Joseph Selle (1906-1988), a photographer and proprietor of Fox Movie Flash, a street photography business in San Francisco, California. There are a few documents relating to Selle's personal life, but the bulk of the papers relate to his street photography business. Most of the documents date from between 1945 and 1975 and include insurance papers, correspondence, legal documents, receipts, tax records, cashbooks, employment applications, newspaper clippings, licenses and permits, payroll materials, and bank statements, as well as samples of photographs from the business.

Language: English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information
This collection was donated by Bob Rose.

Available Formats

Processing Information
Processed by Erin Molloy (intern), February, 2011; supervised by Alison Oswald, archivist.

Preferred Citation
[Title and date of item], Bob Rose Street Photography Collection [business records and photoprints], circa 1930-1973, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, box number x, folder xx, digital file number xxxxxx.
Restrictions on Access

This collection is open for research. Some materials in Series 3, Financial Materials, Subseries 3, Bank Records, are restricted. Some materials contain items with social security numbers. See repository for more details.

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Biographical Note

Street photographer Joseph (Joe) Nicolas Selle (1906-1988) was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and grew up in the small, rural town of Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. His father, born in Strasbourg, Germany, worked as a portrait photographer. In 1933, he moved to the West Coast. According to a eulogy found in the collection written by a member of the Elks Club, Selle attended barber school before joining the Merchant Marines as a seaman, though the dates of his service are unknown. The eulogy indicates that Selle, along with a man named Harry Chesterfield, worked on a project that allowed for fresh water to reach the island prison of Alcatraz.

Selle began taking photographs at the 1933-1934 Chicago World's Fair, and began working as a street photographer in 1936. He traveled to Texas, where he met his future wife, Augusta ('Gusta) Crosbie from San Antonio, Texas. They were married on May 29, 1938 in Nevada and then moved to Washington state. In 1940, Selle operated his first street photography business with co-owner T. Hegge, called Actionette Studios. The business had two offices, one in Seattle, Washington at 1331 3rd Avenue, (at the corner of 3rd Avenue and Union Street) and one in Spokane, Washington (at the corner of Riverside and Wall Street). In each city, Selle and Hegge stood near major thoroughfares and photographed pedestrians as they walked by. They then handed the pedestrians photograph order cards with a specific number that correlated with their photograph. If the customer was interested, they could send the order card with their home address and twenty-five cents to Actionette Studios, where Selle and Hegge would print the photograph and mail it to the customer.

Selle moved to San Francisco in either 1939 or 1940, and sought a buyer for his business. On November 12, 1940, Selle and Hegge entered into a conditional sales contract with Kurt Riess for the rights, equipment, and property of Actionette Studios for five thousand dollars. On December 16, 1940, Selle and Hegge were summoned by the Superior Court of the State of Washington as defendants in Riess vs. Selle and Hegge. Riess alleged that Selle and Hegge fraudulently misrepresented the profitability of the business in Spokane; Selle and Hegge denied the charges. They reached a settlement, the details of which are unknown.

Licensed to drive a public vehicle in 1942, Selle worked as a taxi cab driver and a rental car chauffeur periodically until 1945 while taking photographs on the streets of San Francisco. On May 16, 1946, Selle became licensed to conduct business as the owner of Fox Movie Flash, the street photography company he would operate for the next forty years. The office was located in downtown San Francisco at 942 Market Street, above the Pix Theater. Selle and the photographers he hired would stand on street corners and photograph pedestrians as they walked by. The solicitation process was similar to that of Actionette Studios. The photographers would hand pedestrians they photographed an order card with the number of the photograph printed on it, which the customer could then mail along with a specific payment, (ranging from twenty five cents in the mid-1940s to two dollars in the 1970s) for copies of the image.
With a staff of photographers (including the donor of the collection, Bob Rose, who also served as a promotional manager), darkroom technicians, and administrative personnel, Fox Movie Flash documented life in the prime retail shopping districts of San Francisco. Selle would frequently position himself at one of his favorite intersections, typically in front of the Flood Building at Market and Powell Streets or in front of the Pix Theater at Market and Mason Streets. Some of his other favorite locations included the corners and side streets around Union Square, and on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. The photographers used modified DeVry 35mm newsreel-type movie cameras that were loaded with 100-foot rolls of film, capable of snapping up to 1500 images. The cameras were focused ten feet in front of the photographer, allowing them to point and shoot a specific spot repeatedly. Selle had the rolls of film developed in his darkroom by technicians, and they printed the images that people ordered.

Fox Movie Flash photographers worked in the California towns of Fresno, San Jose, Sacramento, and Stockton, as well as San Francisco. The photographers in his employ photographed numerous celebrities, including Marilyn Monroe, Red Skelton, the Iranian Shah, Ayatollah Khomeini, Edward, the Duke of Windsor, and Wallis Simpson. According to Andrew Eskind of the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York, which houses Selle's entire archive of photographs and negatives -- a total of about one million images -- Fox Movie Flash was in operation until the 1970s. Towards the end of his career as a street photographer, Selle and Augusta owned a beef cattle ranch in Sonoma, California. He died in 1988.

References


Scope and Content Note

The collection documents the professional activities of Joseph Selle (1906-1988), a photographer and proprietor of Fox Movie Flash, a street photography business in San Francisco, California. There are a few documents relating to Selle's personal life, but the bulk of the papers relate to his street photography business. Most of the documents date from between 1945 and 1975 and include insurance papers, correspondence, legal documents, receipts, tax records, cashbooks, employment applications, newspaper clippings, licenses and permits, payroll materials, and bank statements, as well as samples of photographs from the business.

Series 1, Biographical Information, 1938-1981 and undated, contains textual documents providing personal information on Joseph Selle, including seller's permits, his marriage license to Augusta Crosbie Selle, a bail receipt from the Berkeley Police Department, correspondence, business and identification cards, a map of the University of California, Berkeley campus where Selle took photographs, and a copy of his eulogy. Other materials in this series include a contract transferring ownership of Actionette Studios from Selle and T. Hegge to Kurt Reiss, court documents related to the lawsuit Reiss brought against Selle and Hegge, correspondence with lawyers, and rental lease agreements. This series also contains newspaper clippings about Selle and Fox Movie Flash, as well as clippings relating to street photography, advertisements placed by Selle to hire photographers, and attendance records of California State Fairs, some of which Selle photographed.

Series 2, Operating Records, 1941-1981 and undated, consists of four subseries: Subseries 1, Administrative Materials, 1941-1975 and undated; Subseries 2, Correspondence, 1938-1981; Subseries
3, Weekly Reports, 1947-1952; and Subseries 4, Payroll, 1945-1948. This series contains the bulk of the information about Selle’s street photography business. Materials include licenses and permits for Selle and his photographers, including Bob Rose, the donor of this collection and promotional manager for Fox Movie Flash. Other materials include insurance policies, office supplies (such as stationary and rubber stamps), booklets containing blank order cards handed to potential customers, applications for employment, weekly reports on the photographs taken by all employees (which are arranged chronologically by employee surname), and payroll ledgers.

Also included is correspondence with Selle and Fox Movie Studios. The bulk of the subseries consists of letters, although some telegrams and postcards are included. Some of the letters relate to personal matters, though the majority of them deal directly with the operation of the business. Frequent correspondents include officials at the California State Fair, where Selle held a concession to take candid photographs in 1949, 1952, 1953, and 1956. Selle also corresponded with his lawyer William H. Rois of Rois & Fowler when he was being sued by Kurt Reiss for breach of contract and misrepresentation about Actionette Studios. Additionally, Selle received correspondence from the Better Business Bureau which mediated between Fox Movie Flash and dissatisfied customers who requested refunds. The remainder of the correspondence consists of orders for photographs taken by Fox Movie Flash cameramen by customers, and orders to and from vendors for supplies.

**Series 3, Financial Records, 1940-1975 and undated**, consists of four subseries: Subseries 1, Business Records, 1944-1947; Subseries 2, Tax Records, 1945-1975; Subseries 3, Bank Records, 1942-1975; and Subseries 4, Receipts, 1940-1975. This series contains both personal and business financial records of Selle and Fox Movie Flash. Included are city, state and federal tax returns, as well as tax documents from the California Department of Employment. Also included are business records and ledgers, bank statements, bills, checks, financial notes, payroll ledgers, and receipts. Many of his receipts are from equipment and materials purchased for the company, including film, developing chemicals, and paper from companies such as Ansco Photographic Materials and Equipment, Brooks Cameras, Eastman Kodak Stores, and The Haloid Company; equipment repair from Friedberg-Smith Optical Instruments; bus tickets and material shipping to and from Fresno from Pacific Greyhound Lines; postage from the United States Postal Service; office supplies from Wobblers, Inc.; and help wanted advertisements from the San Francisco Examiner.

**Series 4, Photographs, 1941-1950 and undated**, contains photographic prints, most sized four by six inches. Additionally there are fifteen photographic prints that have been mounted onto both sides of four by six sheets of metal or wood. These mounted prints were used by the photographers to display sample photographs to prospective customers. These mounted prints have been placed into sink mats for protection. The photographs were taken on the streets of San Francisco, at the 1941 California State Fair in Sacramento and on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. The majority of the campus photographs feature college students, graduates, and faculty members. These photographs also feature male soldiers and sailors, and “WAVES,” women in the US Naval Reserve (Women's Reserve). The street photographs in San Francisco feature unknown pedestrians, Selle and other street photographers, camera equipment, and celebrities. The celebrities in these photographs include actors Edward G. Robinson, Tony Curtis and Bing Crosby, heavyweight boxer Primo Carnera, and burlesque dancer Noel Toy.

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**Arrangement**

Collection is divided into four series.

**Series 1, Biographical Information, 1938-1981 and undated**

**Series 2, Operating Records, 1941-1981 and undated**
Subseries 1, Administrative Materials, 1941-1975 and undated
Subseries 2, Correspondence, 1938-1981
Subseries 3, Weekly Reports, 1947-1952
Subseries 4, Payroll, 1945-1948

**Series 3, Financial Records, 1940-1975 and undated**
Subseries 1, Business Records, 1944-1947
Subseries 2, Tax Records, 1945-1975
Subseries 3, Bank Records, 1942-1975
Subseries 4, Receipts, 1940-1975

**Series 4, Photographs, 1941-1950 and undated**

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**Names and Subject Terms**

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

**Subjects:**
- Photographers--1950-1970
- Photography, Flash-light
- Street photography

**Types of Materials:**
- Business records--20th century
- Photographs--Photoprints--Silver gelatin--20th century

**Names:**
- Actionette Studios
- Fox Movie Flash Co.
Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Information, 1938-1981 and undated

Box 1, Folder 1  Joseph Selle, 1938-1951, undated
Box 1, Folder 2  Legal Documents, 1938-1944
Box 1, Folder 3  Newspaper Clippings, 1939-1981, undated
Series 2: Fox Movie Flash, 1941-1981 and undated

Subseries 2.1: Administrative Materials, 1941-1975 and undated

Box 1, Folder 4  Licenses and Permits, 1941-1975
Box 1, Folder 5  License and permit applications and correspondence, 1941-1948
Box 1, Folder 6  Insurance policies, 1946-1975
Box 1, Folder 7  Insurance correspondence, receipts, and miscellaneous, 1945-1973, undated
Box 1, Folder 8  Fox Movie Flash/Actionette Studios supplies, undated
Box 1, Folder 9  Rubber stamps, undated
Box 1, Folder 10  Photograph order card booklets, undated
Box 1, Folder 11  Competitor’s order cards, undated
Box 1, Folder 12  Fox Movie Flash completed photograph order cards, 1946-1947, undated
Box 1, Folder 13  Applications for Employment, 1946-1952, undated
                         Office Supplies, undated

Subseries 2.2: Correspondence, 1938-1981

Box 1, Folder 14  General, 1938-1981
Box 1, Folder 15  Better Business Bureau, 1945-1947
Box 1, Folder 16  California State Fair, 1942-1956
Box 1, Folder 17  Rois & Fowler, Attorneys at Law, 1941
Box 1, Folder 18  Photograph Orders, 1943-1948
Box 1, Folder 19  Supply Orders, 1939-1947

Subseries 2.3: Weekly Reports, 1947-1952

Box 1, Folder 20  Blank Weekly Report Forms, undated
                         2.3.1
                               1947, 1947
                               2.3.2
Box 1, Folder 21  Clements, Pete,, 1947
Box 1, Folder 22  Filson, Henry "Hank,"1947
Box 1, Folder 23  Gottwald, Steve,, 1947
Box 1, Folder 24  King, Homer E.,, 1947
Box 1, Folder 25  King, Marvin F. "Jack,"1947
Box 1, Folder 26  Lambert, Wesley R.,, 1947
Box 1, Folder 27  McConnell, Walter,, 1947
Box 1, Folder 28  Norelius, Donald R.,, 1947
Box 1, Folder 29  Selle, Llewellyn Joseph "Bud,"1947
Box 1, Folder 30  Selle, Richard,, 1947
Box 1, Folder 31  Toomey, John C.,, 1947

Subseries 2.3.3: 1948, 1948

Box 1, Folder 32  Beebe, Charles E.,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 33  Brickley, James D.,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 34  Clements, Pete,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 35  Commack, Raymond N.,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 36  Compton, Roland,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 37  Filson, Henry "Hank,"1948
Box 1, Folder 38  Jewett, R. R.,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 39  King, Marvin "Jack,"1948
Box 1, Folder 40  Norelius, Donald,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 41  Petoil, Donald,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 42  Pierce, Richard M. "Reech,"1948
Box 1, Folder 43  Redegeld, J. J.,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 44  Robertson, Bob,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 45  Selle, Llewellyn Joseph "Bud,"1948
Box 1, Folder 46  Selle, Richard,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 47  Sigrist, Howard,, 1948
Box 1, Folder 48  Zavaletta, Johnnie Raphael "Cisco,"1948

Subseries 2.3.4: 1949, 1949

Box 1, Folder 49  Beebe, Charles E., 1949
Box 1, Folder 50  Carter, Joseph A., 1949
Box 1, Folder 51  Chesterfield, Harry., 1949
Box 1, Folder 52  Clements, Pete., 1949
Box 1, Folder 53  Commack, Raymond N., 1949
Box 1, Folder 54  Frazee, William F., 1949
Box 1, Folder 55  Gough, Bob., 1949
Box 1, Folder 56  King, James R., 1949
Box 1, Folder 57  Luckie, M. E., 1949
Box 1, Folder 58  McIntosh, W. R., 1949
Box 1, Folder 58  Newbert, Joel G., 1949
Box 1, Folder 60  Pierce, Richard M. "Reech,"1949
Box 1, Folder 61  Selle, Joe, 1949
Box 1, Folder 62  Selle, Llewelyn Joseph "Bud,"1949
Box 1, Folder 63  Sigrist, Howard., 1949
Box 1, Folder 64  Snowden, George., 1949
Box 1, Folder 65  Spinale, Carmel A., 1949
Box 1, Folder 66  Tufert, James M., 1949
Box 1, Folder 67  Von Seeback, James., 1949
Box 1, Folder 68  Wilson, J. H., 1949

Subseries 2.3.5: 1950, 1950

Box 1, Folder 70  Clements, Pete., 1950
Box 1, Folder 71  German, E. A., 1950
Box 1, Folder 72  
Gough, Bob., 1950

Box 1, Folder 73  
Jenning, Gordon., 1950

Box 1, Folder 74  
Norelius, Donald R., 1950

Box 1, Folder 75  
Pierce, Richard M., "Reech,"1950

Box 1, Folder 76  
Selle, Joe., 1950

Box 2, Folder 1  
Selle, Llewelyn Joseph "Bud,"1950

Box 2, Folder 2  
Selle, Richard R., 1950

Box 2, Folder 3  
Sigrist, Howard., 1950

Box 2, Folder 4  
Zavaletta, Johnnie Raphael "Cisco,"1950

Subseries 2.3.6: 1951, 1951

Box 2, Folder 5  
Gough, Bob., 1951

Box 2, Folder 6  
Jennings, Gordon., 1951

Box 2, Folder 7  
Johnson, John E., 1951

Box 2, Folder 8  
Norelius, Donald R., 1951

Box 2, Folder 9  
Pierce, Richard M. "Reech,"1951

Box 2, Folder 10  
Robbins, O. E., 1951

Box 2, Folder 11  
Selle, Joe., 1951

Box 2, Folder 12  
Selle, Llewelyn Joseph "Bud,"1951

Box 2, Folder 13  
Starkey, William E., 1951

Box 2, Folder 14  
Zavaletta, Johnnie Raphael "Cisco,"1951

Subseries 2.3.6: 1952, 1952

Box 2, Folder 15  
Jennings, Gordon., 1952

Box 2, Folder 16  
Johnson, John E., 1952

Box 2, Folder 17  
Pierce, Richard M. "Reech,"1952

Box 2, Folder 18  
Selle, Joe., 1952
Box 2, Folder 19  Selle, Llewelyn Joseph "Bud,"1952
Box 2, Folder 20  Sigrist, Howard,, 1952
Box 2, Folder 21  Zavaletta, Johnnie Raphael "Cisco,"1952

Subseries 2.4: Payroll, 1945-1948

Box 2, Folder 22  Totals,, undated
Box 2  Account books, 1945-1948
Binder 2 (text)  Account books, 1945
Box 6, Folder 1 (text)
Box 6, Folder 2  Account books, 1946
Box 6, Folder 3  Account books, 1946
Box 6, Folder 4  Account books, 1946-1948
Box 6, Folder 5  Account books, 1948
Box 2, Folder 23  Employees Released, 1945-1946
Box 2, Folder 24  Altee, Robert L.,, 1948
Box 2, Folder 25  Baker, Mary A.,, 1945-1946
Box 2, Folder 26  Baker, William A., 1945-1946
Box 2, Folder 27  Blumenthal, E. F.,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 29  Clements, Pete O.,, 1947-1948
Box 2, Folder 30  Commack, Raymond N.,, 1948
Box 2, Folder 31  Compton, Roland E.,, 1948
Box 2, Folder 32  Cox, Bennie,, 1945-1946
Box 2, Folder 33  Filson, Henry L.,, 1947-1948
Box 2, Folder 34  Gottwald, Steve,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 35  Griffin, Jennavera H.,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 36  Gumba, Antoinette C.,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 37  Heskins, Ruth,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 39  King, Homer E., 1947
Box 2, Folder 40  King, Marvin F. "Jack,"1946-1948
Box 2, Folder 41  Krause, Helen M., 1947-1948
Box 2, Folder 42  Lambert, Wesley R., 1946-1947
Box 2, Folder 43  McConnell, Walter,, 1947
Box 2, Folder 44  Norelius, Donald R., 1947-1948
Box 2, Folder 45  Petercupo, Mark A., 1946
Box 2, Folder 46  Phemester, Walter J., 1946
Box 2, Folder 47  Redegeld, Joseph J., 1948
Box 2, Folder 48  Rester, Chas Herbert,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 49  Robertson, Grant W., 1945-1946
Box 2, Folder 50  Robertson, Jack,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 51  Rose, Robert E., 1945-1947
Box 2, Folder 52  Sawdet, Rolland K., 1945-1947
Box 2, Folder 53  Seaman, Chas H., 1946-1948
Box 2, Folder 54  Selle, Llewelyn Joseph "Bud,"1947-1948
Box 2, Folder 55  Selle, Richard R., 1946-1948
Box 2, Folder 56  Schultz, Leonard,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 57  Terry, Franklin Phillip,, 1946
Box 2, Folder 58  Toomey, John C., 1946-1947
Box 2, Folder 59  Whipple, Freeda., 1946-1947
Box 2, Folder 60  Piece work,, 1945-1947
Box 2, Folder 61  Miscellaneous,, 1946-1947
**Series 3: Financial Materials, 1940-1975 and undated**

**Subseries 3.1: Business Records, 1944-1947**

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<th>Business Record,, 1944-1945</th>
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<td>Ledgers, 1944-1946</td>
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<td>Box 6, Folder 7</td>
<td>Ledgers,, 1947</td>
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<td>Box 7, Folder 2</td>
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<td>Box 7, Folder 2</td>
<td>Fox Portrait Studio ledgers, 1944-1946</td>
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**Subseries 3.2: Tax Records, 1945-1975**

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<th>Box 2, Folder 64</th>
<th>Instructions and notices, 1945-1973, undated</th>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 65</td>
<td>Tax returns,, 1945-1974</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 66</td>
<td>United States Treasury Department Tax, 1945-1971</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 67</td>
<td>California Department of Employment, documents, 1945-1949</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 69</td>
<td>California sales tax,, 1947</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 68</td>
<td>California Department of Employment, correspondence,, 1945-1971</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 70</td>
<td>City and County of San Francisco,, 1970-1975</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 71</td>
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**Subseries 3.3: Bank Records, 1942-1975**

**Bank Statements, 1942-1951**

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<th>Box 2, Folder 72</th>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 76</td>
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Box 2, Folder 78  1948, 1948
Box 2, Folder 79  1949, 1949
Box 2, Folder 80  1950, 1950
Box 2, Folder 81  1951, 1951

Box 3, Folder 1  Deposits and checks, 1942-1975
Box 7  Check stubs [restricted], 1944-1945
Box 7, Folder 4  Check stubs, 1945-1947
Box 7, Folder 5  Payroll check stubs [restricted], 22 Oct 1945 - 27 Apr 1946
Box 7, Folder 6  Payroll check stubs [restricted], 27 Apr 1946 - 26 Oct 1946
Box 7, Folder 7  Payroll check stubs [restricted], 26 Oct 1946 - 5 July 1947
Box 3, Folder 2  Utility statements, 1946-1947
Box 3, Folder 3  Out of town expenses, 1946

Subseries 3.4: Receipts, 1940-1975

Box 3, Folder 4  General, 1940-1974, undated
Box 3, Folder 5  Ansco, 1945-1946
Box 3, Folder 6  Brooks Cameras, 1970-1975
Box 3, Folder 7  Coldwell Banker and Company, 1945-1974
Box 3, Folder 8  Eastman Kodak Stores Inc, 1946
Box 3, Folder 9  Friedberg-Smith, 1945-1946
Box 3, Folder 10  Haloid Company, 1945-1946
Box 3, Folder 11  Hirsch & Kaye, 1945-1946
Box 3, Folder 12  Pacific Greyhound Lines, 1946-1947
Box 3, Folder 13  San Francisco Examiner, 1945-1946
Box 3, Folder 14  United States Postal Service, 1946-1975
Box 3, Folder 15  Wobblers, Inc., 1945-1946

Subseries 3.5: Financial notes, 1945-1976, undated

Box 3, Folder 16
Series 4: Photographs, 1941-1950 and undated

*Box 3, Folder 17*

- Box 4, Folder 1-4: Mounted prints, undated
- Box 5: Unmounted prints, undated