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Norris C. Blackburn papers

Title: Norris C. Blackburn papers
Collection No: MSS.455
Creator: Norris C. Blackburn (1898-1994)
Extent: 0.25 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1917-1990

Abstract: The collection consists of photographs and papers belonging to cotton warehouseman Norris C. Blackburn. The photographs include images taken by Blackburn of the measures taken to counter the great 1937 Mississippi flood around his company's plant. The papers are mostly photocopies of correspondence and clippings related to Blackburn's work in the cotton industry and his interest in sport.

Donor: Norris Blackburn, Memphis, Tennessee, 1990.
Processed by: Gerald Chaudron, March 2014.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: Norris C. Blackburn papers, Department of Preservation and Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: March 2014

Biographical information

Norris Campbell Blackburn was born on September 3, 1898, and died on November 8, 1994. After working on the St. Louis-San Francisco Railroad for three years, he started working in the Memphis cotton warehousing industry. His first employer was the Memphis Terminal Corporation from 1916 to 1927, starting at the South Memphis plant, moving to the Riverside Plant, and then to the accounting department. Following the mergers to create the Union Compress & Warehouse Company in 1923, Blackburn became manager and bookkeeper in the main office and then treasurer in 1936. In this position, he was responsible for safeguarding the cotton threatened by the great Mississippi flood of early 1937. He rose to become vice-president and general manager in 1941, and then president from 1959 until his retirement in 1968 after surviving an accident on New Hampshire's Mt. Washington cog railway the previous year. He was President of the National Cotton Compress & Cotton Warehouse Association in 1939/1940 and 1954/1955. In 1966 he was elected president of the National Cotton Council, an organization he had helped create back in 1937.

An enthusiastic sportsman, Blackburn captained the YMCA basketball team, 1916-1924, and later played baseball and softball. The first meeting of the West Tennessee State Teachers College Booster Club was held at the Blackburn house in 1938 and he was later elected to Athletic Committee of Memphis State College. He was inducted into Memphis Park Commission Amateur Sports Hall of Fame in 1989.

Blackburn married Frances Nuckols McSpadden (1900-1983) and had a son, Norris, Jr. (1926-1997).

Scope and contents

The collection consists of photographs and papers belonging to Norris C. Blackburn. The photographs include images taken by Blackburn of the levees around, and cotton saved from, the Union Compress & Warehouse Company plant in Memphis threatened by the great Mississippi flood of 1937, and some early photographs of Blackburn when he worked for the Memphis Terminal Corporation. The two folders of papers are mostly photocopies of correspondence and clippings related to Blackburn's work in the cotton industry and his interest in sport.

Subject terms

SUBJECTS:

Cotton trade--Tennessee--Memphis.

Floods—Tennessee—Memphis--Photographs.

NAMES:

Blackburn, Norris C., 1898-1994.

Union Compress and Warehouse Company.

Inventory**Box 1****Photographs:**

NOTE: The images are b/w unless noted otherwise.

Folder 1. 1922, 1937. 3 items.

1922 Cotton Temple at Tri-State Fair. Building made of cotton bales,
cotton spread on roof.

1937 flood:

Union Compress & Warehouse Company, levee on north end of Navy
Yard plant.

Union Compress & Warehouse Company, south end of Navy Yard plant.

Folder 2. 1937 flood. 5 items.

Union Compress & Warehouse Company, east side of plant.

Union Compress & Warehouse Company, sandbags and levee around plant at
Wolf River.

Union Compress & Warehouse Company, private railroad tracks inside plant (2).

Union Compress & Warehouse Company west side, showing sandbags and Jones
& Laughlin Steel Corporation.

Folder 3. 1937. 3 items.

Cotton bales stored on Tutwiler Avenue.

Cotton stored on Front Street.

Levee around south end of Union Compress & Warehouse Company.

Folder 4. 1937 flood. 3 items.

Cotton bales stored on Front Street between Poplar and Jackson Avenues.

Cotton stored on Exchange Street.

Cotton stored on Southwestern football field.

Folder 5. Menu, 1945. 2 items.

Color image of front page of menu from Roosevelt Hotel, New Orleans, La.

Blackburn and others dined there the night the end of World War II was
announced. As a memento of the occasion, all the men in the party signed the
menu. Also b/w image of menu.

Folder 6. Various. 3 items.

Blackburn in 1919 when he was a Riverside Plant weigher at Memphis Terminal Corporation.

Group of men at Memphis Terminal Corporation, Riverside Plant, 1917.

Cotton compress machine with two men operating it.

Papers:

Folder 7. 1922-1983, undated (mostly photocopies). 14 items. Includes:

“Key to Cotton exhibit of Memphis Terminal Corporation”, Tri-State Fair, 1922 September.

“Key to Cotton exhibit of Memphis Terminal Corporation”, Cotton States Commission, 1922 December.

Memorandum from Organization Committee of National Association of Cotton Warehouses, 1937.

Form letter Blackburn sent to friend and business associates to assist West Tennessee State Teachers College Athletic Association, 1938 April 21.

C.C. Humphreys, Athletic Director, Memphis State College, to Blackburn inviting him to annual football banquet, 1950 December 7.

Richard Nixon to Blackburn, 1968 December 2.

Blackburn’s description of moving cotton during 1937 flood, undated.

Folder 8. 1989 October-1990 January (mostly photocopies). 18 items. Includes:

Blackburn inducted into Memphis Park Commission Amateur Sports Hall of Fame, 1989.

Correspondence, newspaper clippings, sketches of Blackburn’s athletic involvement.

1918-1919 Y Triangles basketball team.

Folder 9. Photocopies of photographs in collection. 15 items.