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## **Maritime records\***

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### **Company records**

At the height of its shipping operations immediately prior to the First World War, the Adelaide Steamship Company (ASC) maintained one of the largest fleets in Australia, with cargo and passenger services to most parts of the Australian coastline. The company was formed in 1875 by a syndicate of South Australian businessmen and pastoralists, some of whom were already operating steamship services in Spencer Gulf. The company continued its involvement in interstate shipping until it sold its interest in a subsidiary, Bulkships Ltd., in 1977.

The company records were first transferred to the Archives of Business and Labour in 1982. The most valuable sources for maritime history are the minutes of board meetings and general meetings between 1875 and 1900, and letter-books 1891–1912. These series comprise 37 volumes and document the formation of the company, its early expansion, and issues such as involvement in goldmining in Western Australia during the 1890s and the maritime strike of 1890. The fleet records, share registers (1875–1920), personnel records, photographs and memorabilia make up the bulk of the ASC collection.

Records which document the company's fleet include: ships' plans; trip books outlining ports of call; a series of files containing press cuttings, photographs and other information on company vessels; and the notebooks maintained by company officers which provide details of fleet specifications, freight contracts, port facilities and other information between 1898 and the 1930s. Personnel records are confined to registers of engineers and deck officers and cover the periods 1890–93 and 1915–72.

An outstanding feature of the ASC collection is its extensive collection of photographs, some of which are poignant social documents. They depict the company's offices at ports around Australia, company staff, passengers, waterside workers, and the company fleet throughout its history. A notable item is an album of photographs by Harold Cazneaux, which was commissioned by the company. The album is a rare example of Cazneaux's industrial photography, depicting the 1920s buildings and employees of the Abermain and Seaham collieries at Newcastle.

The Adelaide Steamship Company collection also contains records of Coast Steamships Ltd, Federal Wharf Co. Ltd, Port Adelaide Dredging Company Ltd, Spencer Gulf Shipping Co. Ltd and other subsidiaries.

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\* Since this article was written in 1985, significant additions have been made to most of the collections mentioned, and other relevant collections have been placed with the Archives. Detailed finding aids of these additions are available at the Archives.

## Employer organisation records

The Australasian Steamship Owners Federation (ASOF) was established in September 1899. The federation modelled itself on the Shipping Federation, London, and its founding members were Huddart Parker & Co., McIlwraith McEachern & Co., the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand, the Australasian Steam Navigation Company, and the Adelaide Steamship Company. ASOF negotiated and represented member companies in the determination of wages and conditions for employees, maintained a register of vessels owned and operated by members, and acted on other matters of mutual concern to member companies such as shipping legislation, trading agreements, shipping accidents and port conditions.

In 1905 the Commonwealth Steamship Owners Association (CSOA) was formed and registered under the Conciliation and Arbitration Act to assume the industrial responsibilities of ASOF. The two bodies were identical in composition. The Archives holds approximately 57 metres of records of CSOA, ASOF and their predecessor, the Victorian Steamship Owners Association.

The larger of the two collections, Deposit E217, includes minutes of the ASOF (1901–59) and copies of Sydney, Newcastle, Fremantle, Brisbane and Adelaide Branch Minutes (1939–59). It also includes minutes of the CSOA (1920–58), and minutes of its branch organisation, the NSW Interstate Steamship Owners Association.

The subject files include ASOF and CSOA correspondence arranged in groups of files according to employee associations or general subject areas such as staff matters and cargo protection. The Merchant Service Guild, Australian Shipping Officers Association, Federated Clerks Union, Institute of Marine and Power Engineers, and Waterside Workers Federation are some of the employee associations covered in this series.

The records of the ASOF and CSOA provide valuable information on maritime employers' approach to industrial disputes, particularly during the 1940s and 1950s. The records also outline the development of unification amongst employers in the maritime industry in response to the growth of the trade union movement, government policies and regulations and the growth in competition from other modes of transport.

Other relevant records include: copies of minutes of the Associations of Employers of Waterside Labour in Western Australia, Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales for the 1940s and 1950s; minutes of the Employers of Maritime Labour in South Australia; and the Joint Committees of Management of the Shipowners Waterside Pay Offices in Sydney and Melbourne for the 1950s. These organisations dealt with issues in the employment of waterside workers and maintained a more broadly based membership to include stevedoring companies and international shipping companies. The Shipowners Waterside Pay Offices in particular operated as a labour bureau and pay office for waterside workers.

## Employee organisation records

### **Introduction**

The quantity of records held by the Archives varies widely between unions. For example, the Federated Marine Stewards and Pantrymen's Association deposit consists of four volumes of

minutes of the Federal Council (1915–1952) and the NSW Branch (1916–1929). Its sister union, the Marine Cooks, Bakers and Butchers Association has deposited 13.5 metres of archives, which span the life of the organisation from its split with the Marine Stewards in 1907 to its amalgamation with the Seamen's Union in 1982.

The Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers, the Waterside Workers Federation and the Seamen's Union of Australia are the big depositors, each having transferred over 100 metres of records. The records of the Merchant Service Guild and the Professional Radio Employees Institute each occupy about 50 shelf metres.

### **19<sup>th</sup> century records**

The earliest maritime union records held at the Archives were produced by the Port Phillip Shipwrights Society, which was formed in 1864. Minute books of the society dating from 1874 to 1893 have survived. Membership records date from 1871.

In the late 1880s the Sydney Seamen's Union, with 4000 members and £3500 in the bank, was one of the strongest unions in Australia in terms of wealth and membership, yet only its members' contribution books for 1876 to 1883 have survived. An early minute book of the Queensland Branch was transferred by the Federal Office of the Seamen's Union of Australia in 1982. The minutes cover the period March 1888 to January 1893.

Microfilm copies of minutes of the Sydney Wharf Labourers Union from 1889 have been lodged with the Archives, together with some early records of the Fremantle Lumpers and Newcastle Coal Trimmers Unions. The archives of the Port Adelaide Working Men's Association (a benevolent society) documenting the period 1872–1945 were deposited with the records of the Port Adelaide Branch of the Federation.

The Australian Institute of Marine Engineers has deposited: the minutes of the Federal Council and Sydney District which date from its formation in 1880/81; Sydney District membership and financial records from 1880; some early letter books of the Federal Council; and a library of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century trade text books.

### **Early 20<sup>th</sup> century records**

Both the Merchant Service Guild and the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers have very extensive archives. Their records of the first few decades of this century are copious. The standard categories of trade union records can be observed in the deposits of archives created in this period: rules, minutes of general, council and executive meetings; membership, financial and industrial material; correspondence; and ephemeral printed material. The guild, in particular, has a comprehensive set of industrial files for this period.

The main record series of the Marine Cooks, Bakers and Butchers Association have also been deposited intact: executive and general meeting minutes from 1908; the membership register from 1907; industrial agreements and awards; and court judgments, transcripts and other material associated with disputes, dating from the making of the first agreement in 1908.

The Archives also holds some early records of the Professional Radio and Electronics Institute of Australasia. Marine wireless operators formed the Merchant Service Radio Telegraphists Association in 1912. In later years the membership expanded to include a wide

range of radio and television employees in on-shore industries. Lists of early members of the institute and minutes of its meetings from 1912 to 1917 are held, but there are no minutes thereafter until the mid-1930s. As is typical of many organisations, the institute has collected various early documents in 'history files'. These files include notes for talks, other written reflections on the institute's history, and a chronology of its significant events.

The deposit of records made by the Waterside Workers Federation in 1964 (T62) comprises 15.5 shelf metres of Federal Office records from its formation in 1902 to 1944. It is the strongest group of maritime trade union archives of the period and all the more significant because of the industrial militancy of the federation. Deposit T62 holds the financial records of the federation 1902-1940, copies of industrial agreements 1900-1938, and 55 volumes of transcripts of Arbitration Court hearings involving the Waterside Workers Federation, 1910-1944. Branch correspondence from approximately 60 federation ports throughout Australia for the period 1914-1940 has been preserved. Membership records for all federation branches for this period were transferred to the Archives in a subsequent deposit. The federation has encouraged all its branches to deposit their archives and although few 19<sup>th</sup> century records have been received, the deposits of 20<sup>th</sup> century records have been extensive.

The Archives also holds some records of the Seamen's Union of Australia. For example, minutes of stop-work meetings in most ports (with some gaps) are held from 1917. Federal Office archives also include some of the General Secretary's correspondence during the 1930s, industrial and financial material from the 1920s, and an extensive series of press cuttings, 1919-1956. Sydney, Fremantle and Adelaide branch records supplement the Federal Office archives of the period. For example, substantial records of the Dredge and Maritime Services Board Employees Union of NSW 1918-1972 are included in the Sydney branch deposit, together with a few records of the Marine Motor Drivers and Coxswains' Association of NSW.

Records of the Australian Foremen Stevedores Association held in the Archives include Sydney minutes 1920-1967, press cuttings, and papers of R J Morris who was editor of the association's journal and an active member of 'The Movement'.

Minutes and correspondence of the Maritime Transport Council (MTC), which was the unions' peak council 1933-64, are held with the archives of its affiliates. James Tudehope, Secretary of the Marine Cooks 1914-1964, was also Secretary of the MTC. Much of the correspondence of the council is mingled with the Marine Cooks' records.

### **The post-war period**

The bulk of the maritime trade union records held at the Archives have been produced during and since World War II. Material on shipping includes files on individual ships that are kept by most of the seagoing unions, and minutes of shipboard meetings of members of the Seamen's Union of Australia dealing with matters directly concerning that particular ship. Other shipping records include correspondence with shipowners, files on the impact of new technology on the industry, and material related to campaigns mounted by the unions in support of an Australian-owned shipping industry.

The post-war records of the Waterside Workers Federation and the Seamen's Union of Australia are notable for the breadth of their national and international concerns. Records of

the women's auxiliaries of both unions are held, together with material on the peace movement, indigenous Australians, environmental matters, immigration, foreign-owned companies in Australia, Indonesian independence, the Malayan emergency, the Korean and Vietnam Wars and scores of other social and political issues.

*Edited December 2001*