
Descriptive Summary

Creator: Balsas Valley Navigation and Improvement Company

Title: Balsas Valley Navigation and Improvement Company. Documents,

Date (inclusive): 1904 - 1932

Extent: 0.20 linear feet(1 archives box)

Abstract: Documents related to the Balsas Valley Navigation and Improvement Company (Compania de Navegacio y Mejoras del Valle y Rio Balsas Mexico) that operated a navigation concession on the Balsas River in the Mexican states of Michoacan and Guerrero from 1909 to 1921. The main partners in the company were Luis Terrazas, Jr. and Frank S. Kirkland. Materials include documents and newspaper clippings related to the company and to other enterprises in northern Mexico. The collection contains some personal correspondence and items belonging to the company's last proprietor, William C. Ammerman. Also included is a typescript by N. Johnson entitled "A Study in Mexican Entrepreneurship by Two North Americans in the Early 20th Century: Rio Balsas Company and Related Enterprises." The material is arranged in four series: 1) BALSAS COMPANY DOCUMENTS, 2) RELATED HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS, 3) MISCELLANEOUS, and 4) ORIGINALS OF PRESERVATION PHOTOCOPIES.

Repository: University of California, San Diego. Geisel Library. Mandeville Special Collections Library.
La Jolla, California 92093-0175

Collection number: MSS 0556

Language of Material: Collection materials in English

Access

Collection is open for research.

Acquisition Information

Not Available

Preferred Citation

Balsas Valley Navigation and Improvement Company. Documents, MSS 0556. Mandeville Special Collections Library, UCSD.

Publication Rights

Publication rights are held by the creator of the collection.

Historical Background

The Balsas Valley Navigation and Improvement Company was founded as an outgrowth of a navigation concession granted by the Mexican government on March 18, 1909. Confirmed by full Congress on April 8, 1909, the contract granted Luis Terrazas, Jr. and Frank S. Kirkland the rights to navigate the full distance of the Rio Balsas through the states of Michoacan and Guerrero. Terrazas, the son of the prominent governor of the state of Chihuahua, and Kirkland, an engineer from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, formed a partnership that benefited from the political connections of the Mexican national and the technical skill of the American engineer. Establishing offices in both Chihuahua and Mexico City, the company aimed to become a great trading monopoly by creating a riverboat-railroad system that would allow the Balsas Valley's great resources of timber, ores, and agriculture to be removed and transported from the region.

With initial surveys of the valley completed in 1911, the company set up temporary promotional offices in El Paso in order to attract wealthy investors from the United States. As the primary developer of transportation facilities in the Balsas Valley region, the company easily commanded the attention of U.S. capitalists eager to export timber from Michoacan. Other American investors with interests in the region's natural resources were also drawn to the company. In December of 1911, a group of potential investors embarked on a highly publicized five-month long inspection trip on the Balsas. Mindful of the region's potential value but wary of immediately investing in a country beset by political and economic unrest, a corporation headed by one of these investors intended to buy the entire company and acquire the original transportation concession once peace had been established in the country. Assured by experts on the inspection trip that the river could be made navigable with the blasting of a few rocks, members of the corporation made capital available that enabled the company to begin work on clearing the channel. The investment also made it possible for the company to purchase its first steamboat, which was christened the "Coyuca" after the town of the same name on the upper Balsas.

With the death of Frank S. Kirkland in October of 1912 and the unwelcomed effects of the Mexican Revolution on business in the region, the company became relatively inactive during the next decade. In his will, Kirkland granted one-fourth of the company to William C. Ammerman,

an American mining engineer who had served as Kirkland's assistant since 1906. Ammerman attempted to revive interest in the company after Kirkland's death but the country's political situation and the growing number of investors interested in oil rather than ores frustrated his efforts to acquire the capital needed to continue Kirkland's work. The company lost its concession through non-compliance and was dismantled in 1921.

Scope and Content of Collection

Documents related to the Balsas Valley Navigation and Improvement Company (Compania de Navegacion y Mejoras del Valle y Rio Balsas Mexico) that operated a navigation concession on the Balsas River in the Mexican states of Michoacan and Guerrero after 1909. The main partners in the company were Luis Terrazas, Jr. and Frank S. Kirkland. Materials include documents and newspaper clippings related to the company and documents related to other enterprises in northern Mexico. The collection contains some personal correspondence and items belonging to the company's last proprietor, William C. Ammerman. Also included is a typescript by N. Johnson entitled "A Study in Mexican Entrepreneurship by Two North Americans in the Early 20th Century: Rio Balsas Company and Related Enterprises." The material is arranged in four series: 1) BALSAS COMPANY DOCUMENTS, 2) RELATED HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS, 3) MISCELLANEOUS, and 4) ORIGINALS OF PRESERVATION PHOTOCOPIES. The material in each series is arranged chronologically.

SERIES 1: BALSAS COMPANY DOCUMENTS

The BALSAS COMPANY DOCUMENTS series provides evidence of the company's operations during its twelve-year history. The first inspection report by Terrazas and Kirkland provides a description of the region and offers a preview of the company's plans. A folder of materials related to the inspection trip by investors in 1911 includes newspaper clippings, correspondence, and expense reports that detail the five-month long tour. A piece of company letterhead included in the collection contains an illustration of the Coyuca, the first steamboat purchased by the Balsas Company. Correspondence within the series contains discussions of financial matters with investors. Frank S. Kirkland's last will and testament offers a summary of the company's finances in addition to granting one-fourth of the company to his assistant, William C. Ammerman. Ammerman's 1921 report on the region serves as a comprehensive account of the geography of the region, the company's history, and Ammerman's own experiences in the Balsas between 1906 and 1921.

SERIES 2: RELATED HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

The RELATED HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS series gathers material found in the collection that lacks evidence of a direct link to the operations of the Balsas Company but retains a connection to the history of entrepreneurship in northern Mexico. Possibly predating the formation of the Balsas Company, several documents detail timber, mining, and agricultural enterprises in northern Mexico. Newspaper clippings spanning the period of the company's operation continue chronicling the exploitation of natural resources in the country. After the Balsas Company's dissolution in 1921, William C. Ammerman took an interest in the harvesting of candelilla wax in Texas and northern Mexico as a possible business endeavor. Included in the collection are two articles on the processing and uses of the wax as well as Ammerman's proposal to potential investors.

SERIES 3: MISCELLANEOUS

The MISCELLANEOUS series contains a map of Mexico, an unidentified photograph from the Mexican Revolution, a subject file, and a typescript related to the history of the Balsas Company. The subject file gathers personal correspondence and items belonging to William C. Ammerman, the company's last director. A typescript of N. Johnson's study of the Balsas Company offers a history of the company's operations based upon primary sources found in this collection, published secondary sources, and an oral account by the author's grandfather, who counted himself as a friend of Kirkland and Ammerman.

SERIES 4: ORIGINALS OF PRESERVATION PHOTOCOPIES

The ORIGINALS OF PRESERVATION PHOTOCOPIES series contains brittle newspaper clippings that have been photocopied.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects

Ammerman, William C

Kirkland, Frank S

Terrazas, Luis

Balsas Valley Navigation and Improvement Company -- Archives

Americans -- Mexico.

Investments, American -- Mexico -- History

Mexico -- History -- 1910-1946

Michoacán de Ocampo (Mexico) -- History

Guerrero (Mexico : State) -- History

Contributors

Johnson, N. -- Study in Mexican entrepreneurship by two North Americans in the early 20th century

BALSAS COMPANY DOCUMENTS

- box 1, folder 1 **Report on the Balsas River Valley in Mexico by Luis Terrazas, Jr. and Frank S. Kirkland 1909**
- box 1, folder 2 **Trip on the Balsas River, from Balsas Station downstream 1911 - 1912**
- box 1, folder 3, **Kirkland, Frank S. to attorney Harris Walthall 1911**
oversize MC14906
- Note**
- Letter, includes blueprints of two boat designs.
- box 1, folder 4 **Company letterhead 1912**
- Note**
- Contains image of the steamboat Coyuca.
- box 1, folder 5 **Evans, Frank H. to Frank S. Kirkland 1912**
- Note**
- Telegrams
- box 1, folder 6 **Last will and testament of Frank S. Kirkland 1912**
box 1, folder 7 **Hampson, T.L. to William C. Ammerman 1920 - 1921**
- Note**
- Letters.
- box 1, folder 8 **Report of the Rio Balsas covered by the transportation concession of F.S. Kirkland and Luis Terrazas, Jr. 1921**
- Note**
- By William C. Ammerman.

RELATED HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

- box 1, folder 9 **Timber Lands owned by the Asunsulo Estate and Banco de Londres y Mexico**
Note
1904?
- box 1, folder 10 **Aurora-Sirena Production**
Note
1906?
- box 1, folder 11 **Informe Relative a las Minas LA ZARABANDA, EL REFUGIO, LA ESCONDIDA Y AMPLICACION**
Note
1906?
- box 1, folder 12 **One Million, Sixty Five Thousand Acres of Land in State of Coahuila, Mexico**
Note
1906?
- box 1, folder 12 **Report on Stock Ranch in State of Coahuila, Mexico**
Note
1906?
- box 1, folder 13 **Miscellaneous newspaper articles 1910 - 1923**
box 1, folder 14 **Candelilla wax 1921 - 1925**

MISCELLANEOUS

box 1, folder 16, **Map of Mexico 1904**
oversize MC14906

Note

Published by Rand-McNally, includes railroads.

box 1, folder 17 **Ammerman, William C. 1906 - 1932**
box 1, folder 18, **Photograph of Mexican revolutionary soliders loading horses into railroad car**
oversize MC14906

Note

1911?

box 1, folder 19 **Johnson, N. "A Study in Mexican Entrepreneurship by Two North Americans in the Early 20th Century..." 1980**

ORIGINALS OF PRESERVATION PHOTOCOPIES

box 1, folder 20 **Originals of Preservation Photocopies**