

Guide to the Charles E. Butner Papers, 1911-1957



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Charles E. Butner Papers, 1911-1957 (bulk 1917-1957)

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Descriptive Summary

Title:

Charles E. Butner Papers, 1911-1957 (bulk 1917-1957)

Collection Number:

MS 033

Creator:

Butner, Charles Edgar, 1888-1957

Abstract:

The Charles Edgar Butner Papers contain sketches and drawings from the architect's travels in California and Europe; newspaper clippings, photographs, ephemera, and a scrapbook on his service as an aviator in World War I and a limited number of drawings of Butner's commissions in the San Joaquin Valley and Monterey Bay area in California in the early decades of the twentieth century. Purchased by Cal Poly in 1986.

Extent:

25 boxes, 3 artifacts

Language:

English

Repository:

Special Collections, Robert E. Kennedy Library
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407-0605

Administrative Information

Provenance:

Purchased by Cal Poly in 1986.

Access:

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Preferred Citation:

[Identification of Item]. Butner Papers, Special Collections, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Calif.

Abbreviations Used:

c.: circa

n.d.: no date

Indexing Terms

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

Subjects:

Architecture -- California.

Architecture, Domestic -- California -- San Joaquin Valley.

Architecture, Domestic -- California -- Salinas.

Butner, Charles Edgar, 1888-1957

Butner, Charles Edgar, 1888-1957-- Career in Architecture.

Butner, Charles Edgar, 1888-1957-- Notebooks, sketchbooks, etc.

Glass, Edward, 1886-1954

Glass, Edward, 1886-1954-- Career in Architecture.

Genres and Forms of Material:

Framed sketches and drawings

Newspaper clippings

Ephemera

Scrapbook

Photographs

Biographical Note

Charles Edgar Butner was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on July 31, 1888. Butner enrolled in the Architecture program at the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied under the renowned Beaux-Arts architect and educator Paul Philippe Cret. While at Penn, Butner befriended fellow architecture student Edward Glass (1886-1954), the son of the influential California newspaper publishing family that owned the *Fresno Morning Republican*.

In 1911, Butner completed his studies at Penn, receiving the Certificate of Proficiency in Architecture. He then ventured to New York to work for Grosvenor Atterbury, FAIA, and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., on Forest Hills Gardens, one of the country's oldest planned communities and the most prominent American example of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement.

Glass, who graduated in 1912, entered the Philadelphia offices of Heacock & Hokinson as a drafter, followed by a stint with the firm of Mills & Bonkirk. He then relocated to New York to take a position with leading classical architects Tracy, Swarthout & Litchfield. In 1913, Glass returned to California, passed the state architectural licensing exam, and settled in San Francisco as a partner in the firm of Smith, Stewart & Glass.

In 1914, Edward Glass returned to Fresno and eventually he and his college friend established the partnership of Glass & Butner. Through the social and political connections of Edward Glass, the young firm secured a number of residential and commercial commissions, as well as large school contracts.

In 1917, Butner was drafted and served during World War I as an aviator in the Army Air Services. He trained at Taylor Field, outside Montgomery, Alabama, served in France, and rose to the rank of captain before he was discharged at the end of the war and returned to Fresno.

In the boom period following the war's end, the firm of Glass & Butner prospered. In October 1919, Governor Stevens appointed Edward Glass to the California State Board of Architecture. That same year, the firm opened an office in San Francisco, where they entered the War Memorial Veterans Building competition with a design proposal costing \$2.5 million, but the project became mired in regional politics and was never built.

In this same period, Glass and Butner reportedly produced a set of documentary drawings of the missions of California at the request of publisher William Randolph Hearst, but the drawings are now lost. Glass & Butner closed the San Francisco office and in the early 1920s, after nearly a decade together, they dissolved the partnership when Glass' wife became seriously ill. The two architects remained close friends, occasionally working together to design a variety of projects over the coming years.

During the early Depression years, Butner attempted to maintain both his original office in Fresno and a branch office in Salinas with his new partner, William Stranahan. Stranahan's sudden death in 1932 prompted Butner to close the Fresno office and move permanently to Salinas. Charles Butner became a prominent civic

leader in that town and built a thriving practice with commissions throughout the Monterey area. He joined the American Institute of Architects on November 10, 1936, and was also a member of the Northern California and eventually the Monterey Bay Area chapters of the AIA.

In both Fresno and Salinas, Butner enjoyed membership in the American Legion, Scottish Rite, Rotary, Elks, and Masons. He managed the firm until his death in Salinas on June 10, 1957, from a heart attack. His wife, Sally, two stepsons, two brothers, and a sister survived him. Two of his buildings, the Physicians building (1926) and the Fresno Republican Printery (1919) are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Sources

Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Ancestry.com

California Death Index, Ancestry.com

Salinas Californian, June 11, 1957, n.p.

Butner Exhibition, John Edward Powell, curator, Fresno, 1985

Scope and Content

The Charles Edgar Butner Papers contain sketches and drawings from the architect's travels in California and Europe, newspaper clippings, photographs, ephemera, and a scrapbook on his service as an aviator in World War I and limited information on Butner's commissions in the San Joaquin Valley and Monterey Bay area in California. The collection was purchased in 1986.

The most extensive portion of the collection is in Series 2, subseries A, containing architectural sketches made during Butner's travels in California and Europe. Throughout his career as an architect, he enjoyed drawing and painting. The earliest work in the collection is a sketch of Philadelphia City Hall, which dates from his student days at Penn. This small pencil drawing is rendered with the soft, architectural qualities that characterize many of the travel sketches and watercolors he produced throughout his life. Of particular interest are European streetscapes, which probably date to World War I, when Butner served in France as a pilot in the U.S. Army Air Services.

The balance of the sketches in the collection dates from the 1920s and 1930s. Diverse in stylistic interpretation, choice of media and technique, these selected examples of Charles Butner's drawings and paintings were assembled from his personal collection, which is now believed to be lost. They reflected his lifelong fascination with the ornamental characteristics of classic architecture, and his delight in the romantic and picturesque qualities of Mediterranean buildings. Red tile roofs, white-washed adobe walls, towers, and village scenes were the images Charles Butner most often captured in his art, and were the themes which inspired the designs of many of his built works interpreted in the Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean Revival Styles. Few of the sketches have much to do with projects in his architectural practice but instead reflect his Beaux-Arts-influenced training and ability to meticulously document the structures of the past.

Most are pencil or watercolor sketches. Butner created one oil painting included in the collection during the Depression, using house paint because artist's oil paints were too expensive. It is believed that most of the plans for Butner's commissions were destroyed at his death in 1957.

In addition, the collection contains photographs related to his years with the United States Army Air Services during World War I and other personal materials.

Where possible, the provenance, or original organization, of the papers has been preserved. However, in order to simplify access to the collection for researchers, the sketches in the collection were reorganized in alpha order by title to more accurately reflect their contents.

The collection is divided into two series:

- Series 1: Personal and Professional Papers
- Series 2: Art and Artifacts

The collection is housed in 25 boxes, with Series 2.A. Sketches containing the most extensive and unique portions of the collection.

Series Description/Folder List

Series 1. Personal and Professional Papers

Contains two subseries: A. Personal Papers and B. Job List.

A. Personal Papers

Contains photographs, ephemera, and a scrapbook arranged by format, from 1918-1957. 7 folders.

Box 1 Folder 1

Photograph of Charles E. Butner, c. 1920

Box 1 Folder 2

Photograph of Charles Butner's mother with the Women's Golf League, Sunnyside Country Club, Fresno, c. 1920s

Box 1 Folder 3

Statement of Line of Descent Charles E. Butner, (84-122D)

Box 1 Folder 4

Photograph of Charles E. Butner piloting biplane at Taylor Field, Alabama (84-122A), 1918

Box 1 Folder 5

Ephemera of Charles E. Butner, 1920s

Box 1 Folder 6

Scrapbook on the life and career of Charles E. Butner, 1920-1957

Box 2 Folder 1

History & Life of Charles E. Butner, framed (84-123), undated

B. Job List

Contains framed list of Butner's commissions. 1 folder.

Box 3 Folder 1

Butner Partial Chronological Listing Projects & Buildings, 1914 -1940

Series 2. Art and Artifacts

Contains two subseries: A. Sketches and B. Artifacts.

A. Sketches

Contains drawings and sketches made by Butner in the course of his travels, arranged alphabetically by title, from 1911-1944. Most are signed and framed under glass. 20 boxes.

Box 4 Folder 0

[Arched bridge with towers], colored pencil on paperboard (84-113), undated

Box 5 Folder 0

Carmel Mission, Carmel, Calif., colored pencil sketch (84-108), undated

Box 6 Folder 0

Charles Butner Residence, black-and-white print (84-107), 1924-26

Box 7 Folder 0

Charles Butner Residence, pencil sketch on paperboard (84-111), undated

Box 8 Folder 0

Coast Monastery, watercolor on paperboard (84-103), c. 1918

Box 9 Folder 0

French Street Scene, watercolor on paperboard (84-102), c. 1918

Box 10 Folder 0

General Sherman's Headquarters, Monterey, Calif., pencil on flimsy [pencil on trace] (84-112), 1933

Box 11 Folder 0

Ghost Town, watercolor on paper (84-117), undated

Box 12 Folder 0

Iberian Fortified Bridge, house paint on masonite (84-116), undated

Box 13 Folder 0

Iberian village, watercolor on paper (84-109), 1932

Box 14 Folder 0

Mission Inn, Riverside, Calif., colored pencil on paperboard (84-106), 1923

Box 15 Folder 0

Moses, charcoal on paper (84-118), undated

Box 16 Folder 0

North African Street Scene, pencil on paperboard (84-114), undated

Box 17 Folder 0

North African Street Scene, pencil on paperboard, (84-115), undated

Box 18 Folder 0

Philadelphia City Hall, pencil on heavy-ply paper (84-101), 1911

Box 19 Folder 0

Rabat, Morocco, watercolor on paperboard, (84-110), 1944

Box 20 Folder 0

Riverside, Calif. cityscape, colored pencil on paperboard (84-105), 1923

Box 21 Folder 0

Semur-en-Auxois, France, watercolor on paperboard (84-104), c. 1918

Box 22 Folder 0

Southern France, pencil & watercolor on paper (84-119), undated

Box 23 Folder 0

Spanish Walls, watercolor on paper (84-120), 1943

B. Artifacts

Contains material artifacts owned by Butner, arranged by format, from 1918-1928. 3 items.

Box 24 Folder 1

World War I Medal, cast bronze (84-122B), 1918

Box 24 Folder 1

Small cloisonné pin inscribed W.D.C.P.S. (84-122C), undated

Box 25 Folder 0

Oil Painting (84-121), 1928