

AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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May 19, 2016

Ambassador Vilma Martinez
President, Los Angeles Harbor Commission
commissioners@portla.org

The Honorable Joe Buscaino
City Councilmember, Los Angeles 15th District
councilmember.buscaino@lacity.org

Gene Seroka
Executive Director, Port of Los Angeles
gseroka@portla.org

David Roberts
Director, Economic Development and Planning
Los Angeles 15th District
david.a.roberts@lacity.org

Dear Ambassador Martinez and members of the Los Angeles Harbor Commission, Mr. Seroka, Councilman Buscaino, and Mr. Roberts,

The American Historical Association is writing to express concern about the maintenance of the historical and archival records of the Port of Los Angeles. We encourage the port and the city of Los Angeles to ensure that these records are stored in a facility that complies with recognized standards for proper archival materials and storage, that they are looked after by qualified archivists, and that historians are able to access the records for the purpose of research.

The Port of Los Angeles is over 100 years old, and as its own website states has played a vital part in the history of the region, the nation, and the globe through its role in opening up the United States to the Pacific Rim. As the busiest port in the United States, it has a long and important history. Terminal Island, which is within the port, and the community of Japanese Americans who lived there prior to their internment during World War II have unique places in American history. The port also played a vital role in shipbuilding during World War II. Its place in the history of the city of Los Angeles and the entire United States is undeniable. For this reason long-term preservation of its historic records should be ensured for the legacy of the port itself and for the American people.

The archives of the history of the port include a wide range of materials that are of interest to historians of many different types. The records currently under threat include, among other things, the Los Angeles Harbor Department Historical Archives Collection of Engineering Maps, a vital collection of maps, blueprints, and plans dating back to 1872. Maps in this collection are broad in scope but focus primarily on the harbor area; several maps cover a broader geographic area and include the entire expanse of the City of Los Angeles following consolidation. There are even maps within the collection that focus on harbors other than Los Angeles and represent ports both domestic and foreign. Other records of value include 25,000 linear feet of historic materials, including photographs, accounting records, and assorted ephemera. The value of this collection cannot be underestimated.

These resources, which were previously housed in suitable facility at the port, have been moved to a warehouse that is inappropriate because it lacks climate control, and offers no protection from vermin, water damage, and other conditions that can harm unsecured archives. Prolonged storage in these

conditions will lead to rapid deterioration and ultimately the destruction of these unique and vital historical resources.

We urge the Port of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Harbor Commission to take immediate action to ensure the long-term preservation and availability of these vital historic documents in your care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edmund Russell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "E" and "R".

Edmund P. Russell
Vice President, Research Division
American Historical Association