LEON S. PETERS (1905-1983)

PAPERS, 1919-2010 and undated
(bulk 1950-1988)
7 linear feet

ACQUISITION: The papers were donated by Pete Peters in 2009 and Kenneth Peters in 2010.

ACCESS: The papers are open for research.

AUDIOVISUAL: 8 VHS tapes, 33 digital videocassettes, and 10 DVDs in boxes 1-2.

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PHOTOGRAPHS: In boxes 2, 4, 5, 12-15.

Leon S. Peters

Biography

Leon Samuel Peters was born on October 28, 1905, near Fowler, California, to parents Samuel and Lily Peters, the oldest of five children. The Peters family purchased a forty-acre ranch outside of Fowler in 1907 where Peters spent his childhood. Peters attended school in Fowler and graduated from Fowler High School as class valedictorian in 1923. Peters had planned to study law, but the death of his mother shortly before his high school graduation forced him to remain and work on the family farm.

From 1926 to 1929 Peters worked for his uncle’s grape packing and shipping business. In 1929 Peters met with representatives of Valley Foundry and Machine Works in order to negotiate the price and installation of a new pump for a well on the Peters ranch. Mr. Firstenberger, the manager of Valley Foundry was so impressed with Peters’s negotiating skills that he remarked that if Peters could “sell like he bought,” he would like to offer him a job. Peters initially turned down the offer because he felt he didn’t have any knowledge about buying, selling or pumps. Firstenberger was persistent, however, and eventually persuaded Peters to accept the job.

Peters was very successful at selling pumps and soon became the sole salesperson at Valley Foundry. After a disastrous fire in 1931, owner S. P. Keithly almost closed the business. However, at Peters’s suggestion they diversified the business in order to create as much work and income as possible during the Great Depression. When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, Valley Foundry began producing winery equipment.


After World War II Peters became increasingly involved in the community, joining the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and the Fresno Rotary Club. Peters was also very involved with Fresno Community Hospital, serving on the board starting in 1949 and becoming president of the board in 1958. Peters’ accomplishments at Community Hospital include raising $1.6 million to build an expansion, and leading subsequent building drives to further enhance and expand the hospital. The hospital honored his efforts by naming their new rehabilitation center after him in 1976. Peters also became involved with California State University, Fresno, serving as a member of the university advisory board and on the boards for the Agriculture and Business colleges. Peters’ commitment of money and service to Fresno State led to the naming of the new business building after him in 1984. Peters was also a member of the board of Haigazian College in Lebanon from 1963 onwards. He served as a director for the Fresno Charitable
Biography (cont.)

Association, the United Way, the Fresno YMCA and Boy’s Club. Peters was also a Mason and belonged to Las Palmas Lodge 366 and Tehran Temple Shrine.

In November 1983 Peters passed away. His lifetime of community service and dedication earned him the nickname “Mr. Fresno,” and his community and charitable work was continued after his death by his wife, Alice Peters and the Leon S. Peters Foundation and perpetuated by the various awards scholarships that bear his name.
Scope and Content Note

The Leon S. Peters papers measure 6 linear feet and date from 1919 to 2009. The collection is arranged in eight series.

The Biographical information series (1919, 1954-2002 and undated) contains general material related to Peters’s life as well as information on his wife, Alice, and other family members. The series includes a transcript of an interview Peters gave in 1973 as well as taped interviews of family and friends.

The Business interests series (1949, 1960-1986 and undated) consists of material related to Peters’s professional interests. This series mainly focuses on Valley Foundry and Machine Works, the business where Peters started his career and which he later purchased and operated for forty three years. The series also includes information on Peters’ involvement with PG&E and his participation in the Society of Professional Engineers.

The Community activities series (1949-2009 and undated) details Peters’ commitment to philanthropy and improving the local community. Included in this series is material detailing Peters’ involvement in the Fresno Chamber of Commerce, the Fresno Rotary Club and several local fraternal organizations. Also detailed in this series is Peters’ extensive dedication to Fresno Community Hospital and California State University, Fresno. Peters’ participation in the Fresno Armenian community and his interest in local history are also detailed in this series.

The Leon S. Peters Distinguished Service Award series (1983-1986, 1991-2009 and undated) contains video interviews and related documents of the award recipients as well as information about Leon Peters’s life and how it inspired others to become involved in the community.

The Leon S. Peters Foundation series (1980, 1988, 2000 and undated) contains materials related to the foundation set up by Peters’ estate to continue his commitment to philanthropy.

The Naming attempts series (1984, 1995-1996) details attempts by friends and family members to honor the legacy of Leon Peters by naming various structures and landmarks after him.

Scope and Content Note (cont.)

The Travel series (1953, 1962-1971, 1983 and undated) consists of itineraries, brochures and other memorabilia collected during several of Leon and Alice Peters’ vacations and trips around the world.

The Photographs series (1923, 1947-1987 and undated) consists of photo albums, photographs, slides and prints detailing Peters’ involvement in the community, business efforts and personal life.

**Box no.** | **Description**
--- | ---
Box 1 | **Biographical information**
General, 1919, 1968-1984, 2000-2002 and undated (includes 1 VHS tape) (2 folders) (oversize: in box 8)
Family, 1970, 1983
Interviews with family and friends, 1999, 2006-2010 (includes 2 digital videocassettes and 3 DVDs)
  Interview of Leon Peters, 1973

**Business interests**
Society of Professional Engineers, 1949 (oversize: in box 11)

**Community activities**
American Cancer Society, undated
Armenian community, 1982-1985 and undated (includes 1 DVD)
California Bowl, 1982
California State University, Fresno
  Honorary doctorate, 1997
  Leon S. Peters Leadership Awards, 1983-1985, 1993 and undated
Fresno Chamber of Commerce, 1958, 1983 and undated
Fresno Rotary Club
  Scrapbook, 1954-1955

Box 2
Haigazian College, 1968, 1975
Masonic and fraternal organizations, 1981, 1984
Sequoia Council - Boy Scouts of America, Distinguished Citizen Award, 1979
Box no. Description

Box 2 (cont.)

Leon S. Peters Distinguished Service Award
Award and Legacy Project, 2010 (contains 1 DVD)
Award recipient interviews, 2000-2009 (includes 31 digital videocassettes, 8 VHS
tapes and 7 DVDs) (7 folders)

Leon S. Peters Foundation

Naming attempts
Fresno Unified School District elementary, middle or high school, 1995-1996
Mountain in Kings Canyon National Park, 1984

Peters, Alice
Photographs, undated (oversize: in box 12)
Artifacts (in box 6)
Banner, undated (oversize: in map tube A)
Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for Common Threads award, 2002
Fresno Pacific College Presidents Circle membership award, 1994
Paperweight-thank you to Alice Peters and Leon S. Peters Foundation from
Community Medical Foundation, undated
Resolution by California State Senators and Assemblypersons honoring Alice
Peters for Common Threads Award, 2002 (oversize: in box 12)
Saint Agnes Medical Center Charter Award, 1996
Saint Agnes Medical Center Golden Award, 1989

Travel
Alaskan cruise, 1983 (oversize: in box 12)
East Asia vacation, 1963
   Itinerary
   Thailand
   Hong Kong
   Taiwan
   Japan (2 folders)
East Asia vacation, 1968
Europe and Middle East vacation, 1953
   General (2 folders)
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<td><strong>Travel (cont.)</strong></td>
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<td>Europe and Middle East vacation, 1953</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Europe and Middle East vacation and cruise, 1965</td>
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<td>General</td>
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<td>Itinerary</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
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<td>Fresno Executive Tour of the U.S.S.R., 1962</td>
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<td>General</td>
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<td>American pamphlets</td>
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<td>U.S.S.R. miscellaneous (2 folders)</td>
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<td>Mexico vacation, undated</td>
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<td>General</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand-Australia-Fiji-Hawaii vacation and cruise, 1960</td>
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<td>Itinerary</td>
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<td><em>S.S. Oronsay</em></td>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>Box 3 (cont.)</td>
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| | New Zealand-Australia-Fiji-Hawaii vacation and cruise, 1960 (cont.)  
| | Australia (2 folders) |
| Box 4 | Australia (2 folders)  
| | Fiji  
| | Hawaii  
| | Northern Europe vacation and cruise, 1967  
| | General  
| | Itinerary  
| | Ireland  
| | Scotland  
| | Sweden  
| | Finland  
| | U.S.S.R.  
| | Norway  
| | **M/S Stella Polaris**  
| | Denmark  
| | South America and Africa vacation, 1971  
| | General |
| Box 5 | Valley Foundry & Machine Works, 1981 and undated (oversize: in box 13)  
| | Sequoia Council - Boy Scouts of America, Distinguished Citizen Award Dinner, 1979 (oversize: in box 12)  
| | **Travel**  
| | New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Hawaii vacation and cruise, 1960 (oversize: in box 13)  
| | **Framed photographs**  
| | General, 1958 and undated (oversize: in box 14 and framed item storage)
Box 5 (cont.)

Photographs (cont.)
- Framed photographs (cont.)
  - CSUF Foundation Board of Governors, 1977 (oversize: in box 14)
  - Leon and Alice Peters, 1983 (oversize: in box 15)
  - Margaret Lakes, 1956
- Loose photographs and slides
  - General, 1981 and undated (oversize: in box 15)
  - California State University, Fresno
    - Leon S. Peters Building, 1987
  - Stadium, undated
  - Christmas card, 1974
  - Deukmejian, George, 1982-1983 (oversize: in box 15)
  - Family photographs, 1965, 1982 and undated (oversize: in box 15)
  - Fresno Chamber of Commerce
  - Leon S. Peters Distinguished Service Award, 1984
  - Fresno Community Hospital, 1970, 1979, 1981-1982 and undated
    (oversize: in box 15)
  - Fresno Rotary Club, 1971
  - Haigazian College banquet, 1980
  - High school graduation, 1923
  - Masonic and fraternal organizations, 1981 (oversize: in box 15)
  - Peters, Pete, undated
  - Peters residence, 1965
  - San Joaquin College of Law, presentation of honorary doctorate, 1980
  - Saroyan, William, 1980
  - Travel
    - Alaskan cruise, 1983
    - Caribbean cruise, 1980
    - East Asia vacation, 1963
    - Grand Canyon trip, 1964
    - Myrtle Lake, Canada, fishing trips, 1964-1966
    - Northern Europe vacation and cruise, 1967
    - Yosemite trip, 1963
    - Unidentified cruise, 1976 and undated
  - Wente Bros. Winery, 100th anniversary, 1983
Box no.  Description

Box 6

Peters, Alice
Artifacts
Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for Common Threads award, 2002
Fresno Pacific College Presidents Circle membership award, 1994
Paperweight-thank you to Alice Peters and Leon S. Peters Foundation from Community Medical Foundation, undated
Resolution by California State Senators and Assemblypersons for Common Threads Award, 2002 (oversize: in box 12)
Saint Agnes Medical Center Charter Award, 1996
Saint Agnes Medical Center Golden Award, 1989

Artifacts
California Bowl, Buddy Booster Club plaque, 1983
Guardian Industries-Kingsburg Float Plant groundbreaking, glass paperweight and case, 1977
Leon S. Peters Foundation
California State University, Fresno
Plaque, 1995
Paperweight, 1995
Community Medical Foundation gift plaque, 2000

Box 7

Executive producers statue, 1989
Saint Agnes Medical Center Founder Award, 1994
Selma District Hospital Foundation gift plaque, 1994
United Way gift plaque, undated
Masonic and fraternal organizations
Armenian General Benevolent Union paperweight, undated
Las Palmas Lodge. No. 366 banner and tube, 1960

Box 8

Scottish Rite
Hat, undated
Medal, undated
Leon S. Peters

### Box no. Description

**Box 8 (cont.)**

**Artifacts (cont.)**

Masonic and fraternal organizations
- Tehran Shrine Temple
  - Hats (2), undated (oversize: in box 16)
  - Medal, undated
- Pacific Gas and Electric Company, glass paperweight with embedded granite, 1983
- University of California, San Francisco, Hugh Toland Society plaque, 1981
- Valley Foundry and Machine Works, memorial resolution, 1983 (oversize: in box 15)
- YMCA Service Award, undated

Miscellaneous
- Board of directors award, 1979
- Doctor of Humane Letters paperweight, undated
- Richard Nixon paperweight, 1972

**Box 9**

**Oversize:**
- Biographical information
- Biographical information

**Box 10**


**Box 11**

**Business interests**
- Society of Professional Engineers, 1949

**Community activities**
- California State University, Fresno
  - Leon S. Peters Business building, 1984-1988 and undated
- Leon S. Peters Distinguished Service Award
Box no. Description

Box 12

Oversize:
- Peters, Alice
  - Photographs, undated
- Artifacts
  - Resolution by California State Senators and Assemblypersons for Common Threads Award, 2002
- Travel
  - Alaskan cruise, 1983

Box 13

Photographs
- Albums
  - Valley Foundry & Machine Works, 1981 and undated
  - Sequoia Council - Boy Scouts of America, Distinguished Citizen Award Dinner, 1979
- Travel
  - Canada, Grand Canyon, Mexico, Napa and Sonoma Valleys, Sequoia National Park, Soararsis, 1964-1980

Box 14

New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Hawaii vacation and cruise, 1960
- Framed photographs
  - General, 1958
  - CSUF Foundation Board of Governors, 1977

Box 15

Leon and Alice Peters, 1983
- Loose photographs and slides
  - General, 1981 and undated
  - Deukmejian, George, 1982-1983
  - Family photographs, 1965, 1982 and undated
  - Fresno Community Hospital, 1970, 1979, 1981 and undated
  - Masonic organizations, 1981
- Artifacts
  - Valley Foundry and Machine Works, memorial resolution, 1983
Box no.  Description

Box 16

Oversize:
Artifacts
Masonic and fraternal organizations
  Tehran Shrine Temple
  Hat, undated