

Virginia Bennett, Collection, 1860-2013 (KCPL 33)

Kenton County Public Library
Local History & Genealogy Department
Covington, KY

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KCPL 33 Virginia Bennett (1924-2013) Collection, 1860-2013

Introduction:

The Virginia Bennett Collection is comprised of photographs, scrapbooks, subject files, articles, books, video cassettes, assorted memorabilia, and miscellaneous material related to the inland river industry along the Ohio River in the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky area. The materials were collected by Virginia "Harbor Mother" Bennett during her lifetime of work with riverboats, towboats, and other inland vessels.

Biographical Sketch:

Virginia Bennett (1924-2013) was born May 16, 1924, in Campbell County, Kentucky, to Elmer H. and Alene Bennett. Her father, Elmer, was paymaster for the Green Line Steamboat Company. Virginia worked her entire life in the inland river industry, starting at the age of 20. She worked as an office and pay clerk for the Green Line Steamboat Company and as an assistant purser aboard the Delta Queen. In later years she worked as an office clerk, dispatcher, and paymaster for Columbia Marine Services, where she earned the name "Harbor Mother." It was said that she greeted every marine or excursion boat that passed by and welcomed them to Cincinnati.

Bennett worked for BB Riverboats from 1983 until her retirement in 1991. She was also involved in the planning of the first Tall Stacks Festival in 1988 and served as the Grand Marshal of the 2003 Tall Stacks parade of boats. The U.S. Coast Guard honored Ms. Bennett by erecting the Virginia Bennett Light on the south bank of the Ohio River immediately below her Covington apartment. Virginia died December 4, 2013 her funeral was held on the BB Riverboat's Belle of Cincinnati where her ashes were set afloat near the navigation light that bears her name (mile 471.5).

Scope and Content Note:

The Virginia Bennett Collection includes photographs, scrapbooks, subject files, correspondence, business records, articles, video cassettes, assorted memorabilia, and miscellaneous material pertaining to the inland river industry on the Ohio River in the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky area. The collection is divided into 10 different series detailing various aspects of the inland river industry and the life and career of Virginia Bennett. The series are Towboats, Steamers, Dredges, and Barges; The Greene Line; Motor Vessels, Steamers, and Other Boats; The Ohio Valley Improvement Association (O.V.I.A.); River People; Rivers, Floods, Dams, Cities, and Companies; Museums, Tall Stacks, and Miscellaneous; Virginia Bennett; Audio Visual; and Oversized.

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The O.V.I.A. was organized in 1895 to work towards the "canalization and improvement of the Ohio River and provide a navigable channel for uninterrupted commerce." It ultimately worked with the federal government and the Army Corps of Engineers to erect forty nine locks and movable dams on the Ohio between Pittsburgh and Cairo, Illinois.

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- f. 303 "Virginia Bennett a part of Tall Stacks since the beginning," *The Prime Edition*, October 1995
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- f. 305 Thirty-First Annual Ohio Valley Improvement Association Convention,
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- f. 307 Tall Stacks, Newspaper Articles, 1988
- f. 308 Tall Stacks, 1992
- f. 309 Tall Stacks, Newspaper Articles, 1992
- f. 310 Tall Stacks, 1995
- f. 311 Tall Stacks, Calendar pages, September 1997
- f. 312 Tall Stacks, 1999
- f. 313 Tall Stacks, 2003
- f. 314 Large and heavy photos, various boats and scenes
- f. 315 The Indiana
- f. I The Indiana
- f. J Reed Painting Copies
- f. K Kentucky and Maine Photographs, 1996
- f. L Large and Heavy Photographs, Various Boats and Scenes