

Del Ankers and Elizabeth Freire Collection (assessment as of 24 October 2024)

Frank Lafayette “Del” Ankers, Jr. (1916-2008) operated a commercial photography studio in Washington DC at several locations for around 50 years. He married Jane Elizabeth Van Doren (1920-1994) in 1941. After her death, Del married M. Elizabeth Freire in 1997. Ms. Freire donated these records to the DC History Center.

According to published accounts and genealogical records, Del became interested in photography after working at the Lowes Fox Theater in Washington DC in the 1930s. By 1940, while living with his maternal aunt, Mrs. Charles L. (Frances E. Smith) Zuber in Takoma Park, Del had set up his own dark room and listed himself as a photographer.¹ Charles and Frances Zuber were later buried in Fort Lincoln Cemetery – a location connected to some of the content in this collection.

The Del Ankers and Elizabeth Freire Collection currently resides in ten numbered non-archival, cardboard boxes along with one large Kodak Professional Paper box. The collection consists primarily of Del Ankers Studio photographic prints along with negatives, business ledgers, bills, magazine and newspaper clippings, business papers and some personal ephemera. Ankers’s commercial photography studio appears to have been engaged primarily in work on assignment rather than on happenstance. There are some personal photographs interspersed in these boxes – mostly of family members and family gatherings.

The predominant subjects of the examined prints found in various boxes involved people, places, businesses, and events in the District of Columbia. The collection includes many aerial shots Ankers took of DC from atop the National Cathedral and from airplanes. Possibly not in this collection are the many photographs he took in Northern Virginia for developers during the 1950s that sometimes appeared in DC newspaper real estate sections. The donated collection includes a number of promotional shots of local personalities, many from local radio outlets. Some envelopes found in these boxes include subjects connected to businesses from around the US as well as some work from overseas assignments. This collection does not appear to contain many images related to breaking news events or materials related to his work with Jim Henson

¹ See, “Snapshots of a Photographer’s Life,” *The Connection*, Mar 1, 2005 <https://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2005/mar/01/snapshots-of-a-photographers-life/> and 1940 US Census, Takoma Park, MD.

before developing the Muppets characters. However, a more thorough review of the boxes is needed.

These large cardboard boxes and their contents have not been processed (as of October 2024). Some prints in plastic sleeves may be in non-archival quality plastic sleeves. Negatives were grouped together in boxes and were not individually sleeved. Newspaper clippings sometimes may reside interspersed with photographs. A large number of the prints were black and white images.

As currently constituted, the Collection is separated into 10 boxes with the following handwritten annotations on the outside of each respective box²:

Box 1: Job books / Calendars / Accounting / Diaries

Box 2: Photos of Del at work / photos of Del, personal / Documents demonstrating Del's other interests / Studio list / Photographers Del knew

Box 3: Object: Del's carry-on bag with luggage tags [marked as "Fragile"]

Box 4: Relating to operation of Del's various businesses / ID cards / founding & dissolution documents

Box 5: Elizabeth V. Ankers publicity & work related / EVA³ "as model"

Box 6:

- Photos organized by Del circa 2004 to prep for talks he gave at local libraries, community centers, etc. Box had been reorganized prior to [illegible] coming in
- When processing, this should be in series just after business [illegible – organization?] (so series I or II or the latest) demonstrating how Del chose to organize his photos towards the end of his life with an eye towards demonstrating the breadth and depth of his work. When rehousing, keep the envelopes and [illegible – scraps?] he has written on. Tons of info that reveal his thinking.
- Handwritten list in box doesn't match contents completely but it gives a good sense of what we [illegible] here.

² Because of the phrasing for these annotations on these boxes, it appears Elizabeth Freire aided in the identification of contents prior to being donated.

³ Elizabeth V Ankers aka Elizabeth Freire

Box 7: Selections culled by Del and EF for talks he gave / Airlines & Airports / weddings /
Radio / Scripts

Box 8: "Piles" Aerials of DC / Soroptimist Society / Works in publications / DC Clubs & Orgs /
DC Events / DC Businesses

Box 9: Fort Lincoln Cemetery / Presidents + Iwo Jima + Unknown Soldier / Personalities / Misc.
/ Places if not DC / Buses / Street cars / DC Architecture including Mall & Monuments

Box 10: Oversize prints book compiled by E. Freire Ankers, circa 2008 / Shows at DC Armory
Kodak Professional Paper Box (large, flat yellow box): no external label

Overview of contents from boxes examined on 24 October 2024:

Box 6:

- Brochure for 18 May 2004 McLean Rotary Club (Del Ankers presenting)
- College Park Airport "Oddball plane" photos [nd]
- United & other airlines promotional or commemorative photos
- "Mom's" 90th birthday party
- Elizabeth Freire envelope of "decals"
- Cherry Blossom Festival of 1960
- Scans of prints of miscellaneous subjects
- George Enell and Bill Summits TWA staff (Kansas City)
- Automobile purchase receipts (1954-1971)
- Bob Perkins, photos of (circa 1969-1973)
- Chuck Yeager newspaper clippings (2007)
- Elizabeth Freire and Del Ankers reunion picnic photos (21 Jul 2007)
- Van Doren family (1st wife family) reunion photos
- Paradise Acres mobile home materials (Stafford Co.)
- 198 printouts of slides for presentation(s)
- Jane Elizabeth Van Doren portrait photos
- Photo of "Old House" [unk]
- Lobotomy presentation script and related correspondence [1956, Dr. Walter Freeman]
- Photos of fiery airplane crash in McLean, VA [nd]
- Misc photos including aerial view possibly of northern Virginia
- Safeway store interior w/ camera crew setting up

- Mt Vernon accessory buildings w/ broadcasting crew setting up
- Autographed Ronald Reagan photo to Del and Elizabeth Ankers
- Del Ankers professional course certificates
- Miscellaneous clippings (Regardies, WaPo Fairfax Extra, etc)
- Eddie Gallagher promotional photos
- Las Vegas Desert Inn manager's home interior
- DC Armory show [nd]
- Braggs Esso (circa late 1940s, early 1950s)
- Experimental strobe photo samples
- Dog eye surgery presentation materials by Alexandria (VA) Animal Hospital [nd]

Box 8:

- Large number of prints of various subjects, including aerial views of the Pentagon, National Airport, and Tysons Corner

Box 10:

- Six (6) oversized prints rolled up: Cherry Blossom Festival, Ronald Reagan inauguration (1984), aerial views from top of National Cathedral, and crowd around memorial (Jefferson?)
- Art Portfolio binder of Ankers samples: portraits, building interiors, aerials, political figures (Eisenhower & FDR), group photos
- Loose prints: DC streets, Armory shows, Grace Kelly at Walter Reed Hospital
- Boxes of negatives labeled DC and broadcasters

Kodak Professional Paper Box:

- Four (4) oversize B&W prints – aerial views of downtown DC;
- one B&W 11x14 aerial view of northern Virginia looking toward the Potomac;
- one B&W 11x14 aerial view of downtown DC