

# North American Aviation Collection (SC169)

## *Introduction*

The North American Aviation Inc. operated a B-25 factory at the Fairfax Airport in Kansas City, Kansas from 1942-1945. This collection, donated by relatives of former North American Aviation employees, consists of issues of the plant's employee newsletter, notices sent to employees, and a patriotic music catalog.

## *Descriptive Summary*

Title: North American Aviation Collection

Dates: 1942-1945

Size: 0.42 linear feet, 1 box

Collection Number: SC169

## *Donor Information*

Gift, 2014, Roberta Guynn and Jamie Guynn.

## *Citation Note*

North American Aviation Collection (SC169), Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

## *Administrative Information*

Additional form available: The Missouri Valley Special Collections holds additional copies of the *North Amerikansan* newsletter from 1942-1943 (MVSC Q 629.13 N864).

Related Collections: Additional materials on the North American Aviation Collection include *Skyline*, North American Aviation's bi-monthly publication (MVSC Q 629.13 N8642); "'We All Had a Cause': Kansas City's Bomber Plant, 1941-1945" found in *Kansas History*, Winter 2005-2006; *Kansas City B-25 Factory* (MVSC 358.42 F85K 2014); and a biographical description of James Kindelberger, President of North American Aviation Inc., found in *A Century of Kansas City Aviation History: The Dreamers and the Doers* (MVSC Q629.1309 B344c).

## *Historical Sketch*

In the early years of World War II Germany's superior air force proved to be a serious threat to the Allied forces. On May 16, 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested an increase in defense spending from Congress to fund a program enabling the airplane industry to produce 50,000 planes a year. This federal funding allowed the U.S. Army Air Corps to build government-owned, contractor-operated (GOCO) bomber plants in Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas.

The bomber plant in Kansas City, Kansas was built on a seventy-five-acre alfalfa field next to the Fairfax Airport and operation of the facility was contracted to North American Aviation Inc. Construction began on the plant in March 1941 and the first test flight occurred January 3, 1942. At this time the plant had 1,358 employees, most of whom were locals, and all of whom were males between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five. This demographic was quickly depleted as young men went off to war, and the workforce began recruiting older men and women into the vacant positions. By the end of the 1942 women made up over 27 percent of the workforce and were being trained in all manner of production jobs within the factory. Meanwhile African Americans were still mostly relegated to janitorial positions and made up only 5.5 percent of North American Aviation's labor force by the fall of 1943.

Early in 1944, the Kansas City plant became the only source of B-25s as other plants began operations on other models. On October 6, 1944, the Kansas City plant received the Army-Navy E award for excellence in production, and in January 1945 they set a production record. As the war was winding down in mid-1945, employment began dropping off. The Japanese surrendered on August 14, 1945, and Kansas City's North American Aviation B-25 contract was terminated the next day. The plant had produced over 6,000 B-25 bombers and employed over 59,000 men and women of varying age, race, and abilities.

Following the end of World War II, General Motors took over lease of the plant and used it to build automobiles for the next 40 years. In 1989 the former bomber plant was torn down and automobile production moved to GM's new factory on the former Fairfax Airport property.

### ***Scope and Content Note***

This collection contains 143 issues of a weekly newsletter, notices to employees, and a Jenkins catalog of music. The collection is arranged by type and thereunder chronologically. These items were originally collected by the donors' relatives, Ileen Foster-Guynn, and Ruth Foster, who both worked at the North American Aviation plant. On some issues of the newsletters they made note of friends who were mentioned in the publication.

### **Series 1: North Ameri-Kansan Newsletter, 1942-1945**

This series contains 143 issues of the North Ameri-Kansan newsletter with some duplicates. Earlier issues were titled "North Amerikan." The publication was a weekly newsletter developed by Department 61 and distributed to employees that reported general employee news, training opportunities, social events, sports activities, and war related updates.

### **Series 2: Employee Notices, 1942-1943**

This series consists of notices to employees regarding the classified nature of their work, a notice to employees regarding an employee strike on October 19, 1944, an employee questionnaire, and a handout of bus service information.

**Series 3: Jenkins Music Catalog, n.d.**

This series consists of a Jenkins Catalog of Patriotic Music.

***Collection Inventory*****Series 1: North Ameri-Kansan Newsletter, 1942-1945**

- f. 1 North Amerikansan, March 13, 1942 – June 5, 1942 and North Ameri-Kansan, June 12, 1942 – August 28, 1942
- f. 2 North Ameri-Kansan, September 4, 1942 – January 29, 1943
- f. 3 North Ameri-Kansan, February, 5, 1943 – June 25, 1943
- f. 4 North Ameri-Kansan, July 2, 1943 – November 25, 1943
- f. 5 North Ameri-Kansan, December 3, 1943 – April 28, 1944
- f. 6 North Ameri-Kansan, May 5, 1944 – October 27, 1944
- f. 7 North Ameri-Kansan, November 3, 1944 – May 25, 1945

**Series 2: Employee Notices, 1942-1943**

- f. 8 Employee Notices, 1942-1943

**Series 3: Jenkins Music Catalog, n.d.**

- f. 9 Jenkins Music Catalog, n.d.

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**Processed by Kara Evans, Special Collections Librarian/Archivist, April 2015**