



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Kit Mobile Home Manufacturing Company Records

NMAH.AC.0518

Grace Angle

1995

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Arrangement.....	3
Scope and Contents note.....	2
Biographical/Historical note.....	1
Names and Subjects	3
Container Listing	4
Series 1: Advertising Brochures, News clippings and Articles, 1951-1994.....	4
Series 2: Photographs.....	5
Series 3: Publications, 1957-1994.....	6

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Kit Mobile Home Manufacturing Company Records
Date:	1951-1995.
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0518
Creator:	Kit Manufacturing Company.
Extent:	0.3 Cubic feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	Archival materials documenting the manufacture and sale of Kit Mobile Homes.

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Donated to the Archives Center, NMAH, by Mr. and Mrs. Pocapalia in October 1994.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Grace Angle, 1995.

Preferred Citation

Kit Mobile Home Manufacturing Company Records, 1951-1995, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions on Access

Collection is open for research and access on site by appointment. Unprotected photographs must be handled with gloves.

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Biographical Note

Dan Pocapalia in 1994 celebrated a nearly fifty-year association with Kit Manufacturing Company by writing a history of the company that is also the story of his life. Born on December 12, 1916, on a small farm near Santa Monica, California, Mr. Pocapalia is a prototype of the successful self made businessman. His father, born in Pinerolo, Italy, arrived in the United States at the age of 22. His mother, Rosa Camusso, followed shortly thereafter. After working in New York for several years, the young couple moved to California. Named Dante but always called Dan, the boy was the second of four children. One of Dan's earliest pleasure was building things. At the age of 10 or 11 he produced a radio from a pair of earphones found on a dump. His mother died in 1929 and the years of the depression were difficult ones for the family. Dan left school during

the sixth grade to help in the fields, picking truck crops that sometimes did not bring enough to pay freight and commission charges on the produce. By 1938, he had decided to leave the farm and see the country before looking for a real job.

His first real job was at Vultee Aircraft Company (later known as Consolidated Vultee) near his father's farm, at that time in Norwalk, California. Talent and a quick mind compensated for lack of education and experience and very quickly, Dan Pocapalia became a valuable employee on Vultee's wartime government contract for planes. Working thirteen to sixteen hours a day meant financial reward for Dan but little else. Several attempts at enlistment in the military failed because he was considered an essential industrial worker. By 1945, however, most of the talk at the plant was about what one hoped to do after the war ended.

In November 1945, a chance meeting with Bill Worman, a former worker at Vultee, determined Dan Pocapalia's future. Worman was part owner of a trailer business in a nearby plant on Telegraph Road. He planned to build 60 "tear drop" camper trailers because he had found and bought 60 Fulton hitches. He had chosen the name "Kit" to reflect his marketing plan: the units were to be sold in a knocked down kit, which would be assembled by the buyer. In less than a week Dan Pocapalia borrowed \$800 to buy out Worman's other partner to become a one half partner in Kit Manufacturing Company. The new partners decided to redesign the Kit Kamper to increase the simplicity and efficiency of its assembly. The original Kit Kamper was built while materials were still subject to World War II's War Production Board priorities and it and later models illustrate new and creative uses of aluminum and fiberglass. Dan Pocapalia was responsible for the design; Bill Worman for bookkeeping, sales and promotion. Despite shortages of necessary supplies and the money to buy them, their first appearance at the Gilmore Stadium Show in February 1946 was successful. They booked about 500 orders, with some dealers paying in advance.

The work force expanded to meet the demand and the partners decided to enter into an agreement with Sackett Nicholson of Long Beach, California, to be sole distributor for the Kit Kamper. Although they did not get along, Pocapalia recognized Nicholson's expertise and ability as a salesman even though he did not trust him. Similarly, Bill Worman did not get along with nor trust Arnold Romeyn, the bookkeeper for Sackett Nicholson. Despite these problems, the company expanded production to build 3 bedroom mobile homes, dormitory mobile homes for government projects such as the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River, and relocatable classrooms. The tribulation, escapes from bankruptcy, quarrels, and major disagreements among the partners were many but Kit Manufacturing Company became a respected and successful business. When Kit went public in 1969, the shares of each participant in the company were retired for more than \$500,000 out for each participant. Dean Witter & Company underwrote the offering of 1,434,839 shares at \$14.75 a share. The company was listed on the American Stock Exchange in March 1970.

Dan and his wife, Mary Ann, lived in an 81' x 331' Kit mobile home for the first two years of their marriage. Their first child was born while they lived there but as other children came along they moved to a new house built by Mary Ann's architect father. In 1995, Dan Pocapalia marked his 50th year of association with Kit Manufacturing Company, and was still active full time as chairman of the Board, President and Chief Executive Officer.

Scope and Contents

The records of the Kit Manufacturing Company date from 1951 to 1995. They consist primarily of advertising materials, newspaper clippings, copies of Articles about the company and photographs. The photographs portray many of the models built during the years 1951-1995. Most of the models are named and many show the date of production. Many photographs show internal views. However, some are not identified by either name or date. One photograph shows the company's main plant at Caldwell, Idaho.

The collection also includes an autobiographical publication written by Dan Pocapalia, *I Love A Challenge!* This is the interesting story of a successful, self made business man whose inborn skills and quick mind, coupled with determination and hard work, resulted in building a successful new business one that started on the proverbial shoestring and wound up listed on the American Stock Exchange. In the Epilogue, the publication also includes brief references to Mrs. Pocapalia and the five children, as well as short statements

about, Arnold J. Romeym, Bill Worman, and Jim Nicholson, all of whom were involved to a major degree in the growth and establishment of the company.

Arrangement

Divided into 3 series

Series 1: Advertising brochures, newsclippings and articles

Series 2: Photographs

Series 3: Publications

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Mobile home industry
- Mobile homes

Types of Materials:

- Advertising fliers
- Articles
- Black-and-white photographic prints -- Silver gelatin -- 1950-2000
- Fliers (printed matter)

Container Listing

Series 1: Advertising Brochures, News clippings and Articles, 1951-1994

Box 1, Folder 1	Advertising Brochures, 1993-1994
Box 1, Folder 2	Advertising Brochures, photocopies,, 1951-1971
Box 1, Folder 3	Newspaper clippings and Articles, photocopies,, 1957-1973

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Photographs

Box 1, Folder 4	Bonneville Dam Project
	Bowen Triplet; Whitlock, McPherson, Kansas
Box 1, Folder 6	Caldwell, Idaho Plant; shipment to Alaska; Thermopolis, Wyoming
Box 1, Folder 7	Fairview; Insulation
Box 1, Folder 8	Fortuna (negative)
Box 1, Folder 9	Golden State
Box 1, Folder 10	It's Kit All Over
Box 1, Folder 11	Kit Double Width; Expandable 8 ft wide
Box 1, Folder 12	Kit 8' x 30'
Box 1, Folder 13	Mobile Home Furnishings (photographs by A.C. Brown)
Box 1, Folder 14	Mobile Homes, no Identification
	Olympia
	Relocatable Classroom
Box 1, Folder 17	Trojan
Box 1, Folder 18	Welding Chassis for Mobile Homes
Box 1, Folder 19	Kit Staff; Parent Plant, Xerox images

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Publications, 1957-1994

Pocapalia, Dan. I Love a Challenge! [A Half report] at Ki Manufacturing Company. Fly on the Wall Graphics,, 1994

Box 1, Folder 20

Shilling, Frank, Ed. Trailer Trends, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1957

[Return to Table of Contents](#)