

**Archive  
Lakeshore Museum Center  
Louis J. Kanitz Collection Finding Aid**

**Collection:** Louis J. Kanitz Collection

**Object ID Number:** 56-001.001 to 56-001.002

**Location:** LCM Archive, Room 204, Shelf N 6

**Dates:** 1910 to 1972

**Quantity:** One archival box, 10" X 12.5" X 5," .5 cubic feet

**Restrictions:** No Restrictions

**Abstract:** This collection of archival materials provides researchers with information about the life of Louis J. Kanitz. The Kanitz family was prominent in Muskegon, and Louis J. Kanitz's grandfather Louis Kanitz, was a progressive Muskegon pioneer. This collection is composed of letters, certificates, military papers, photographs, and other materials. All of the materials offer researchers with a better understanding of Louis J.'s career with Continental Motors, the development of his military career, his experiences serving in the Navy during WWI and WWII, and his life after he retired from the Navy. The majority of the materials in this collection are from Louis J.'s life from the 1940s until his death in 1972. There are materials within this collection that will provide researchers with a glimpse of certain Muskegon businesses, such as the autobiography in this collection that contains details on the operations of Continental Motors.

**Historical Information:** Louis J. Kanitz came from a well known family and he was the grandson of the Muskegon pioneer Louis Kanitz. To better understand the early life of Louis J. Kanitz, below is biographical information about all three generations of the Kanitz men.

Louis Kanitz, Sr. was born in 1838, one of five children of Gottlieb and Caroline Kanitz. Kanitz Sr. was born in Prussia and came to the United States in the 1850s when he was 14 to join his parents who had settled in Wisconsin. He enlisted in 1861 and served in the 17th Missouri Infantry during the Civil War. After the war, he returned to Wisconsin and married Helen Schneider on April 14, 1866. They had five children: Louis H., Anna Antonia, Hugo, Lucellia, and Edward. Louis Kanitz Sr.'s first wife died in 1878, and he later married Augusta Groch in 1880 and they had two children: Elsie and Paul.

Kanitz Sr. first came to Muskegon in 1869 and entered the building materials business. He had a lime kiln and made bricks, and dealt in bricks, lime, cement, stucco, and building stone. He worked in this business for 15 years until the organization of the Muskegon Valley Furniture Company in 1884. Kanitz Sr. served as the head of the company until its dissolution in 1924. He was named Muskegon's first street commissioner long before paved roads. He served on the water board for two years and acted as one of Muskegon's city police commissioners. Kanitz Sr.

served as a member of the Muskegon Board of Education for 12 years and was named as the chairman of the building committee because of his experience.

Kanitz Sr. served as the treasurer and member of the Michigan Soldier's home at Grand Rapids and was on the board 12 years. He was active in the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) in Muskegon and was present at their last meeting in 1927. Kanitz Sr. was one of the organizers of the Muskegon Traction Company and also the local electric light company. He was a member of the Lovell Moore Lodge, the Commandery and Knights Templar, which were three Muskegon Masonic orders. He was also an early member of the Muskegon Arbeiter Unterstuetzungs Verein, one of the oldest fraternal organizations in Muskegon. Kanitz Sr. celebrated his 90th birthday at a grand party held at the Occidental Hotel. Louis Kanitz Sr. died in 1931 in Muskegon and is buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

Louis Henry Kanitz Jr. was born in 1866 in Sheboygan, Wisconsin and came to Muskegon with his family in 1869. He went to high school in Muskegon and after graduation went to the business college in Poughkeepsie, New York. He came back to Muskegon after he graduated from college in 1887. Kanitz Jr. entered into the general contracting and building material business. He married Katherine Grady. In 1890, he was awarded a medal from the Muskegon Bicycle Club. In 1918, Kanitz Jr. left Muskegon and worked as a general insurance agent in Grand Rapids. Louis H. Kanitz Jr. had four sons: Louis J., Carl, Edwin, and Arthur, and two daughters. Kanitz Jr. was a charter member of the Elks Lodge in Muskegon and a member of Saladin Temple, Mystic Shrine. He died in Grand Rapids in 1940 at the age of 73.

Louis John Kanitz III was born in 1890 in Muskegon to his parents Louis H. and Katherine Kanitz. An athlete, he played basketball and football in school. During the summer while he was still in high school, he worked at Continental Motors, in the core room and foundry at Campbell, Wyant and Cannon. Louis J. also worked for his father and was in charge of minor street paving and construction work. Louis J. graduated from Muskegon High School. He later graduated from the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. Louis J. began his military career in 1908 when he received an appointment to the Naval Academy from the 9th Congressional District in Michigan.

Louis J. studied engineering at a college in New York and focused his studies on materials that would prepare him for examinations with the New York Public Works Department. He was successful and received an appointment as an electrical engineer on the barge projects in New York and the New York Navy Yards in Brooklyn. Louis J. graduated in 1911. With the First World War on the horizon, he served as a chief electrical engineer in the Navy, and was appointed by the Civil Service Department as chief of the Crescent Locks, the largest on the New York Barge Canal.

Louis J. served aboard the battleship *USS Michigan* and was involved with the assistance of General Diaz' escape from Mexico during the insurrection in December, 1913. Afterwards, Louis J. was transferred to the gunboat *Machias* as chief electrical engineer, and in the spring of 1914 traveled on the ship to San Domingo during the political uprising to protect American interests.

In 1914, he returned to civil life and served as an electrical engineer on the New York State Barge Canal, under the Public Works Department. He received this position after passing a

competitive Civil Service exam for electrical engineers. He was in charge of one shift at the hydraulic power plant at the junction of the Barge Canal and the Mohawk River. He resigned from this position in 1916 and secured a position in New York City as Assistant Manager of the New York Credit Clearing Exchange.

With the outbreak of World War I, Louis J. was recalled to active naval duty. His first assignment was at the Public Works Department of the Brooklyn Naval Yard, where he was in charge of construction work at the American Can Company Plant. He then served as Commander M.H. Marker's engineer officer at the Fleet Supply Base. He was refused sea duty on the recommendation of Admiral C.S. Williams, "for the good of the service," and he was retained at the Base. Shortly after Louis J. was promoted to Lieutenant as a line officer, and was assigned to engineering duty.

At the end of the war, in the fall of 1919, Louis J. was placed on inactive duty into the Naval Reserve with the rank of lieutenant commander. He took over his previous duties as Chief Engineer at the supply base as a civilian under the Public Works Department. Louis J. resigned from that position in December, 1919, in order to pursue a more lucrative profession. After discussing his situation with Rear Admiral Josephthal and Commander Marker, he decided to return to his hometown.

Louis J. returned to Muskegon in 1920 and helped organize the Naval Reserve and was in command of the local unit until 1924. During that same time Louis J. was one of the original organizers of the local American Legion Post in which he served as commander. He was awarded a medal in recognition of his role as a Past Commander. In addition, he also formed a real estate firm with Bert Bennett that was engaged in construction and real estate transactions. Named the Bennett-Kanitz Company, it was a \$30,000 corporation and was engaged in buying vacant real estate and erecting buildings for sale or rent. Louis J. served as the secretary and treasurer, his wife Matilda served as the president, and his sister as the vice president.

In March of 1920, he went back to work at Continental as a chief engineer of the new power plant the company was starting to construct. Louis J. secured a position as the company's representative on Continental's construction program, serving under W.H. Angell who was the current secretary. In this role, he was in charge of the building of new machine shops, transmission lines, high pressure super-heated steam lines, transformer stations, and road construction. In addition, one of Louis J.'s first projects was in the construction work on the lake-front power house on Muskegon Lake, building 13, and the Lakey addition.

After the construction was completed, Louis J. worked on marketing new products as part of a modernization program. He was then responsible for the operation and liquidation of the Michigan Material Corporation, which was a subsidiary owned by people in the Continental Motors Corporation. The company supplied gravel and washed sand for construction work and Continental successfully operated the company for two years, liquidating all of its equipment in the interest of Continental stockholders. He was then assigned another company to liquidate, the National Construction Company.

Around 1925, Louis J. took a leading role in the expansion and modernization of Continental. Because the nation as a whole was making a transition from steam powered to gasoline powered portable construction machinery equipment, Louis J. worked to convince Continental to install

an industrial and agricultural motor department. He was successful in his attempts and the company worked on building several accounts in the next couple of years.

In 1931, Louis J. traveled to Russia and Europe as a spokesperson for Continental. His task was to negotiate with the Soviet Russian officials for a large motor building contract. On his return, he talked about his experiences with several different automotive societies and other organizations. Louis J. shared his viewpoint that Russia would probably be involved with the manufacturing of automobiles by providing natural resources, and bringing in technicians from other countries to help get the country moving forward with production. Shortly after, Louis J. became a member of the executive committee of the board of directors and general sales manager of the Continental Motor Corporation of Detroit and Muskegon. Louis J. served on the board for five years, and experienced the issues that arose when Continental had a conflict with the New York Stock Exchange when their stock was ruled off the Exchange and then reinstated later.

In 1932, he was elected to the board of annual stockholders of Continental. In that capacity, Louis J. worked on arranging the loan of about \$3.5 million as a bond issue, participated in by the First National Bank of Detroit and two Chicago based banks. He also organized the Continental Investment Company that sold and distributed to employees \$300,000 worth of bonds. In addition, he worked out the details for the listing of the Lakey Foundry Stock on the Detroit and New York Curb Markets.

Louis J. worked hard to promote Continental Motors. According to Kanitz during a 1933 radio interview, "The Red Seal was symbol of power throughout the motorized world and that Continental motors today, besides powering new low priced automobiles, may be found in almost every phase of this country's industrial and commercial life." Two years later, due to differences of opinion, Louis J. left the Continental Corporation

Outside of his involvement with Continental in the 1930s, Louis J. became a member of the State Advisory committee of the National Economy board and assisted with a plan to reduce national spending on behalf of war veterans. He worked with Phelps Newberry to educate people throughout the state of Michigan on how much the government is spending in veteran hospitals. According to Louis J., "the Economy league will fight for the interests of the disabled war veteran and see that he gets a square deal; but on the other hand it will try to aid the government in cutting down expenditures which now go to men who cannot justly claim war disability. There are a number of men in the Muskegon Legion post who feel the same as I do in this regard. This does not only apply to World war veterans but the veterans of all wars."

After Louis J. resigned from Continental in 1934, he entered the industrial field after a two month break. He contacted his old Navy Commanding officer M. H. Marker, who was the president of the Jewel Tea Company, and set up a 90 day trial basis where Louis J. worked to see if he enjoyed the grocery business. After the 90 days were up, he decided to pursue other types of business.

In January of 1935, he started working for the E.L. Cord Company at the corporate office in Chicago. He worked in a temporary program and then later went to the motor building subsidiary, Lycoming Manufacturing, in Pennsylvania. There, Louis J. was in charge of general

sales, and worked to increase and diversify the company's business as builders for gasoline engines for marine, industrial, and automotive applications.

Due to his wife Matilda's health, in 1937 Louis J. resigned from the Cord Corporation and moved to California where he entered the real estate and construction business. He bought vacant lots and constructed homes on a speculative basis. In 1938, he was invited to become a security salesman for the BankAmerica Company, serving nine branches of the bank out of a Long Beach office.

In 1940, Louis J. joined the staff of the Naval Gun Factory in Washington, D.C. and was a naval inspector of ordinance at the Precision Manufacturing Company factory. In addition, Louis J. was elected as a member of the National Unemployment Committee of the American Legion. In that role, he represented the motor industry on a committee which included industrial and commercial leaders throughout the country who carried on the American Legions national unemployment program. He also served as the commander of the Merritt Lamb Post of the American Legion and was on the National Naval Committee for three years, as well as a member of the Michigan Board of Governors for four years as district committeeman.

In 1941, Louis J. was recalled from his retirement in California to active duty to fight in World War II. He served in the Naval Bureau of Ordnance in Washington for a short period and then he went to Hamilton, Ohio, to supervise the building of gun mounts. He then traveled to York, Pennsylvania, where he was in charge of various ordinance plants manufacturing guns and torpedoes for United States and British forces. During that year at York, the factory that manufactured torpedoes under his supervision was awarded the Army-Navy "E" for outstanding performance.

During WWII, Commander Louis J. Kanitz was the proud recipient of the Medal of the Order of the British Empire for his work during World War II when he was in charge of torpedo construction for the British Navy. Although the Commander was the recipient of many honors and awards during his long and brilliant naval and business careers, none was more valued or important to him than the recognition which was bestowed upon him by the Lord Halifax in the name of The King.

After WWII, Louis J. completed a month's training course with the Naval Reserves in southern waters. He visited the Panama Canal Zone and paid an official call on President Arnulfo Arias and then traveled to Ecuador. He served as the chief of staff for over 1,500 men and officers, and was in charge of training and ordinance in the 11th naval district in Long Beach, California. From 1946 to 1950, Louis J. served as a leader in the Naval Reserves in the Los Angeles area where he supervised the training activities of ten units comprised of 18,000 reservists. He was also a flotilla chief of staff on several training cruises made by destroyers in the Pacific. In addition, Kanitz served on the Admiral's staff.

After retiring from the military service, Louis J. married Golda I. Van Tassel in Las Vegas, Nevada and traveled around the world. After his travels, he searched for an opportunity for further expansion and educational knowledge, where he could put his financial experience to good use. He enrolled in a law class, a real estate and appraisal class, and a speech class at Long Beach City College. Kanitz still had ties to the Muskegon area and was secretary-treasurer of the Benett-Kanitz Company, a local firm handling real estate.

Commander Louis J. Kanitz's name appears on the bronze plaque at the Causeway Memorial, as he was on the committee that brought that project into fruition. He died on June 4, 1972 and is buried in the Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery.

Louis J. Kanitz received the following awards and medals during his military career:

- The Medal of the Order of the British Empire
- Award for Faithful Service to the U.S. Naval Reserves
- Three American Defense Medals
- Two World War II Victory Medals
- Two American Theatre Campaign Medals

**Scope and Contents:** This collection of archival materials is composed of letters, certificates, reports, notes, photographs, published materials, and other types of paper materials.

The *archival materials* in this collection are arranged into the following six series: correspondence, certificates, military papers, autobiography, yearbook, and miscellaneous.

The Correspondence series includes letters sent from Continental Motors informing Louis of his stock membership, responses to Louis's congratulatory letters sent to governmental officials and friends, a congratulatory letter Louis sent as his role as Naval Inspector of Ordinance regarding the Army-Navy E award the York Safe & Lock Company received for production, a letter sent to Louis from the Excelsior Union High School regarding Louis's role in securing a victory bell from the *USS Fullam* as a senior gift, and a letter sent from Britain to Louis's widow after his death regarding the medal Louis received and to send their regrets.

The Certificates series includes the following that Louis J. Kanitz received: a certificate recognizing Louis as an associate member of the U.S. Naval Reserve and U.S. Naval Institute September 24, 1941; certificate of award for the Army-Navy E Award for the York Safe & Lock Co., November 4, 1942; certificate of completion in real estate, real estate appraising, property and causality insurance, and an associate of arts all from Long Beach City College, 1952/1953; and a certificate of appreciation posthumously awarded to Louis by President Nixon. This series also includes a certificate of life membership awarded to Louis H. Kanitz from the Saladin Temple, December 31, 1932.

The Military Papers series contains: a historical account of the Naval Ordinance Plant in St. Louis Missouri focusing on 1941 to 1946 that includes information about the production of torpedoes, information about the building, the plant organization, the operations and other relevant information and photographs; a poem titled "The Laws of the Navy;" two editions of the *National Bulletin-Military Order* from 1955 and 1957; a section of Public Law 108 81st Congress that discusses the reserves of the armed forces and disability and death benefits for veterans and their families; informational sheets that include diagrams and ranks of all military branches and a chart of military ribbons, insignias, and medals.

The Autobiography series includes two copies of a short autobiography of Louis J. Kanitz that was written around 1939. The autobiography covers Louis's childhood, his experiences in the

Navy before and during World War 1, and his career prior to World War II. There are detailed descriptions about Louis J.'s occupation at Continental Motors. One of the copies of the autobiography has a military statement of service stapled to the back cover.

The Yearbook series contains one 1910 yearbook *The Optimist* from the Muskegon High and Hackley Manual Training School. Louis J. Kanitz's photograph is in the yearbook.

The Miscellaneous series includes a folder from Continental Motors with Louis J. Kanitz's name on it, the burial and funeral papers for Louis's first wife Matilda who died in 1962, agreements for both Matilda and Louis's burial, and note cards that provide biographical information.

The **photographs** in this collection are arranged into the following six series: portraits, torpedo, Army Navy E Award, Naval Bureau of Ordinance, Ceremony, and Post WWII.

The Portraits series includes: two high school portraits of Louis J. Kanitz, two of Louis in his Navy uniform from WWI, two of Louis around WWII, two of Louis as a Commander in the 1940s, and three different views of Commander Kanitz working at his desk.

The Torpedo series contains: several different views of the commissioned office personnel of the Office of Naval Inspector of Ordnance standing next to the first torpedo shipment from the Precision Manufacturing Corporation, taken on July 30, 1943, a group shot of Naval officers with employees, and one image taken in 1944 of the final British torpedo special to be sent to the Japanese fleet from the E.W. Bliss Co.

The Army-Navy E Award series includes: several different images taken of the York Safe & Lock Co. employees and Naval officers at a ceremony celebrating after receiving the Navy "E" Award, taken November 4, 1942, one image of Louis J. speaking, one image of Naval Officers holding the Navy "E" Award banner, and several images of Louis J. in his office with an unnamed rear admiral.

The Naval Bureau of Ordinance series contains: several photographs of Louis with company management standing next to an anti-aircraft gun at the York Safe & Lock Co taken on November 30, 1942, a view of the factory production room with "Let's Keep the Navy E" in the background, an image showing a double barrel gun, and three images of Louis J. with Naval officers and male and female employees standing in front of a plant, most likely York Safe & Lock;

The Ceremony series includes: several different interior views of a ceremony held inside the torpedo plant/ ordinance plant with Louis J. and other Navy officers seated in chairs and surrounded by a crowd, Louis J. is speaking in one of the images. The images were taken during WWII, 1941 to 1945.

Post WWII series contains: one image of a group shot of Louis J. with captains and other officers at the U.S. Naval Air Station in San Diego taken on June 3, 1947, Louis J. on a deck of the ship *USS Sherman* in Honolulu where he was the Naval Reserves training supervisor, July 1950, and an image of the victory bell from the *USS Fullam* displayed at Artesia High School in Long Beach, California.

**Arrangement:** This collection was found in a white document box that contained both the archival materials and service medals belonging to Louis J. Kanitz. The collection was assigned the number MS.004 which did not have any relation to an accession file or the original donor information. This collection was traced to an older number and has been renumbered to tie it to this accession, 56-001. The original order is unknown. The collection of archival materials and photographs were arranged into logical series in order to provide the best access possible for researchers. All of the materials were placed in acid-free folders. As this collection is composed of several different types of paper, acid-free interleaving paper have been placed where needed. This collection has been cataloged on PastPerfect.

**Contents: 56-001.001 Archival Materials**

**Series 1: Correspondence**

1933 to 1972

**Series 2: Certificates**

1933 to 1972

**Series 3: Autobiography**

c.1939 to 1941

**Series 4: Yearbook**

1910

**Series 5: Military Papers**

c. 1940 to 1957

**Series 6: Miscellaneous**

Dates unknown

**Contents: 56-001.002 Photographs**

**Series 1: Portraits**

11 Images

1910 to 1950s

**Series 2: Torpedo**

7 Images

1943 to 1944

**Series 3: Army Navy "E" Award**

9 Images

1942

**Series 4: Naval Bureau of Ordinance**

5 Images

1942 to 1944

**Series 5: Ceremony**

7 Images

1941 to 1945

**Series 6: Post WWII**

3 Images

1947 to 1960s