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Cleaver, Oscar Payne, 1905-1996 (MSS 106)

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BIOGRAPHY

Oscar Payne Cleaver was born on January 8, 1905 in Rowletts (Hart County, KY) to Samuel Albert and Dora (Shirley) Cleaver. He attended Hart County schools. Cleaver graduated from Georgia Tech in 1928 with the highest grade point average in his class. He then went on to Yale University, where he received his Masters degree in Electrical Engineering with a minor in drama in 1930. After college he worked for Westinghouse until 1942, when he entered the Army Corps of Engineers. When he left the army in 1946, he was a Lieutenant Colonel. However, he continued as a Reserve Officer until his retirement as a full Colonel in 1964. He became a civilian employee of the Engineer Research and Development Laboratories at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, serving as Chief of the Electrical Department. In 1966, he was designated Acting Technical Director of the Army Mobility Research and Development Center at Fort Belvoir. Cleaver retired in 1968 with a combined military and civilian career of twenty-five years at Fort Belvoir. He received numerous military and civilian awards, including the two highest Army awards given to a civilian, the Meritorious Service Medal in 1962, and the Exceptional Service Medal in 1966. One of Cleaver’s outstanding contributions in the area of lighting included the development of night vision techniques which were used in the Vietnam War.

Besides his military career, Cleaver is also known as the developer of an automatic theater lighting system with a modern version being used by the New York Metropolitan Opera. He is co-author of Stage Lighting, which became a standard work for theatrical lighting. As an engineer for Westinghouse, he developed the lighting system used for the spectacular light and fountain display that was a major attraction at the 1939 World’s Fair. The same year Cleaver was sent to Hollywood to assist in solving lighting problems involved with the filming of the motion picture “Gone With the Wind.” He also was involved with the Manhattan Project in the early 1940s.

Mr. Cleaver died in Florida on April 29, 1996, and is interred in Munfordville, Kentucky.
COLLECTION

This small collection consists of materials related to the military and civilian careers of Oscar Payne Cleaver. It includes a number of photographs related to his work as an electrical engineer at Fort Belvoir. A large number of certificates, recognizing Mr. Cleaver’s civilian and military work are included in the collection. His Masters thesis on stage lighting is included in the collection (B2,F1). A short reminiscence by Cleaver on his lighting work for the film “Gone With the Wind” is a collection highlight. Besides discussing his work, he makes comments about the actors in the film and director, David O. Selznick. The collection contains genealogical information on the Cleaver and Shirley (maternal) families, and information related to the death of Cleaver’s parents.

SHELF LIST

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**BOX 2**

| Folder 1 | “New System of Stage Lighting Control” (Thesis, Yale University) | 1930 | 1 item |

**CATALOG CARD**

MSS CLEAVER, Oscar Payne, 1890-1996
106 1905-1996

Miscellaneous papers related to the military and civilian careers of Hart County, Kentucky, native Oscar Payne Cleaver, who was a lighting expert and was instrumental in the development of night vision equipment. Includes a brief reminiscence about his lighting work on the film “Gone With the Wind.”
1 box. 16 folders. 228 items. Originals 1996.241.1
SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Actors, actresses and acting  B1,F9
Cartoons and cartoonists, 1968  C1-D2,#2
Certificates – Honorary  B1-F4; C1-D2,#2
Cleaver, Dora (Shirley), 1879-1963 – Death of  B1,F12-13
Cleaver, Samuel Albert, 1874-1957 – Death of  B1,F14-15
DeHavilland, Olivia, b. 1916 – Comments about  B1,F9
Diplomas – Georgia School of Technology, 1928  C1-D2,#2
Diplomas - Horse Cave High School, 1922  C1-D2,#2
Diplomas - Yale University, 1930  C1-D2,#2
Gable, William Clark, 1901-1960 - Comments about  B1,F9
Genealogy – Cleaver family  B1,F5
Genealogy – Shirley family  B1,F5
“Gone With the Wind” (Motion picture) – Relating to  B1,F9
Heraldry – Cleaver family  C1-D2,#2
Heraldry – Shirley family  C1-D2,#2
Howard, J. Leslie, 1890-1943 – Comments about  B1,F9
Leigh, Vivian, 1913-1967 – Comments about  B1,F9
Lighting – Special effects  B1,F7,9,10; B2,F1
Motion picture producers and directors  B1,F9
Night vision devices  B1,F7&10
Selznick, David Oliver, 1902-1965 – Comments about  B1,F9
Stage lighting  B1,F7&9, B2,F1
Washington, George, 1732-1799 – Relating to  B1,F11
World’s Fair, 1939 – Relating to  B1,F9

SEE and SEE ALSO CARDS

Gable, Clark
See:
   Gable, William Clark, 1901-1960