George H. Kelley Papers 2002-10

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Biographical Note
George H. Kelley was born in 1906 in Denver, Colorado. His father was a gardener and passed on the trade to both of his sons. George began working in greenhouses near their home at the age of 10, by the age of 21, he was a professional rose grower and by 26, had gained experience at three different nurseries while also attending business school at night. Kelley then moved to Los Angeles and took a job as head propagator with Roy F. Wilcox & Co. He spent thirteen years with Wilcox and during that time began his design career on Hollywood movie sets. His most notable works were the jungles for Tarzan and later a street scene in the 1952 movie Sudden Fear where Kelley was tasked with transforming San Francisco from dreary winter to blossoming summer. His work on movie sets also inspired a lifelong interest in photography. In 1937, Wilcox sent Kelley to the Golden Gate International Exposition (GGIE) site in San Francisco. While taking seed orders, Kelley managed to get hired on at the GGIE as a landscape consultant and designer for the next three years. After the exhibition was closed, he decided to remain in the Bay Area. Settling in South San Francisco with his wife, Ella, and two children, Barbara and Bob, he became a partner in the nursery landscape firm Martin, Overlach & Kelley. Kelley's specialty was interior gardens and his work consisted primarily of patios and terraces for both residential and commercial buildings. After 12 years, the firm was bought out and Kelley began working on larger scale landscape designs. Because of his work on the GGIE, developer Henry Doelger hired him to do the landscape design for the Westlake neighborhood and shopping center in Daly City, which was followed shortly by the Stonestown apartments and shopping center in San Francisco. Kelley designed and operated the flower shops in both of these complexes. In 1954, the David D. Bohannon Organization hired him as landscape architect to transform their 55-acre site of barren ground into the Hillsdale Shopping Center. His design won him the Plant America Award from the American Association of Nurserymen in 1959. He stayed on as resident landscape architect, doing two to three plantings a year, keeping the beds in constant bloom. As a florist, he had developed a special knowledge of Azaleas and used them throughout his designs. Kelley was a strong believer in the use of one color in a particular bed, as opposed to what he referred to as “a tossed salad” of colors, though choosing that color was sometimes difficult. In 1961, Kelley was awarded an honorary degree in Landscape Design from UC Berkeley. He continued to give tours and lectures to many Garden Clubs around California and served as a judge of display gardens at the San Mateo County Fair and Floral Fiesta.
Sources:
“California Center is Year Round Garden Spot.” American Nurseryman.

System of Arrangement
The collection is organized into two series. Within each series, original order has been maintained where evident. In the case of no evident order, an order has been imposed by the archivist.
Scope and Contents
The George H. Kelley Papers spans the years 1939 to c.1990 and documents Kelley’s life and career. The collection is divided into two series: Personal Papers and Professional Papers.

The Personal Papers series consists of clippings relating to Kelley and material he collected relating to his colleague, sculptor Beniamino Bufano. The Professional Papers series consists of Ray De Aragon photographs of Kelley and his largest ongoing project, the Hillsdale Shopping Center, as well as two 16mm film reels and the scrapbook Kelley compiled chronicling his career. It contains news clippings and articles about his life, his projects, and his lectures and tours. It also contains photographs taken by Kelley and others of the Golden Gate International Exposition and Bellingrath Gardens.

Custodial History
The George H. Kelley Papers were donated by his family.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Landscape architecture records.
Landscape architects--California.
Florist Shops
Landscape Architecture Firms
Golden Gate International Exposition
Bufano, Beniamino
David D. Bohannon Organization
De Aragon, Ray
Doelger, Henry
Martin, Overlach & Kelley
Stoneson Development Corporation

SERIES I. PERSONAL PAPERS 1956 - c.1990
Physical Description: .22 Cubic Feet, Box 1
Arrangement
Arranged by type of material.
Scope and Contents
Contains correspondence, news clippings, and a eulogy.

SERIES II. PROFESSIONAL PAPERS 1939 - 1988
Physical Description: 1 Cubic Foot, Boxes 1-2
Arrangement
Arranged by type of material.

A. Photographs
Scope and Contents
Contains portraits and photographs for the Hillsdale Shopping Center.

B. Film
Scope and Contents
Two reels of 16mm film; one of the Charleston Gardens and the other unidentified.

C. Scrapbook
Scope and Contents
Contains photographs, clip files, and some photo reproductions of paper documents.