Finding aid to the Allan C. Brooks papers MVZA.MSS.0304

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Museum of Vertebrate Zoology Archives
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Descriptive Summary
Title: Allan C. Brooks papers
Identifier/Call Number: MVZA.MSS.0304
Contributing Institution: Museum of Vertebrate Zoology Archives
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 5.0 Cubic feet
Date (inclusive): 1867-1946
Abstract: The Allan C. Brooks papers contain paintings, field notes, artwork, correspondence, personalia, and publications spanning 1867 to 1946. The artwork and paintings include originals commissioned for publication in Grinnell’s Wildlife of the Yosemite released in 1924 and Fur-bearing Mammals of California published in 1937. Correspondence provides details of commissions, arrangements, specimen collection and transfer, as well as personal exchange. These materials offer insight into the logistics of wildlife illustration and naturalist livelihood in the early 20th century.
Creator: Brooks, Allan, 1869-1946

Conditions Governing Access
The collection is open for research.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Allan C. Brooks papers, MVZA.MSS.0304, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology Archives, University of California, Berkeley.

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Biographical note
Allan Brooks was born in northern India at Etawah as the son of an Englishman on February 16, 1869. Though Brooks’ father was a civil engineer, he was also an ardent avian aficionado and inculcated this love of ornithology in his son. Under his father’s tutelage, Allan partook in natural history endeavors and wildlife pastimes early on from childhood through adolescence. At the age of four, Allan Brooks was sent to England for schooling, where he resided for eight years before the family uprooted in 1881 to Canada. There, the Brooks family participated in a pastoral lifestyle on their farm and both father and son continued their ornithological recreation, whereupon Allan Brooks sketched, prepared bird skins, and ventured into the nearby regions. Brooks began to seriously invest in his passion in 1894, harvesting local specimens to send to experts and museum collections in the United States and Canada.

Constantly busied and engrossed in his work, Brooks’ career emerged on a more renowned scale with wildlife illustrations in “The Birds of Washington,” published in 1909. This led to further work in a massive undertaking in late 1910 to illustrate for “The Birds of California,” whose work was temporarily suspended with the advent of the First World War. From hunting and collecting specimens, Brooks was already adept with a firearm as a competitive rifle shooter before he enlisted for the war in 1914. He quickly ascended in the ranks to Lieutenant Colonel and distinguished himself as an exemplary sniper. Upon his return five years later, unharmed and in good health, Brooks found himself disenchanted with shooting for sport and immediately resumed his life’s work, committing himself wholly to his natural historical and zoological efforts. Projects flooded in with Phillips’ book “A Natural History of Ducks,” submissions for the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in Berkeley, pictures for Percy Taverner’s “Birds of Western Canada,” and requests from a plethora of other sponsors. “The Birds of California” also completed following the war and became published in 1923 bound in four volumes. Moreover, Brooks was a close compatriot of Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874-1927), who is widely regarded even today as one of the most premier wildlife artists of that time. When Fuertes’s death in 1927 prevented completion of the third volume of “Birds of Massachusetts and other New England States,” Brooks was commissioned for the remaining drawings, and the book was published in 1929. Periodically, Brooks provided articles in editions of the Condor, a Cooper Ornithological Club publication, where he was widely commemorated and celebrated. Later on, Brooks was even commissioned beginning in 1931 to illustrate for National Geographic Magazine, to which he would submit a series of illustrations for 20 following issues.

Throughout his life, Allan Brooks demonstrated an indomitable spirit and enthusiasm for his work. He possessed a strong desire to contribute, educate, and spread knowledge. Truly dedicated to the integrity of his craft, he came into the association and respect of many highly regarded naturalists of the time. Throughout the 1920’s, with Brooks’ consistently immaculate additions to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, he found friendship and longtime correspondence in the museum’s first director, Joseph Grinnell. Notably, though Grinnell tried, Brooks, demure by nature, turned down a proposition by Grinnell to pursue an autobiography. Brooks also corresponded with the museum’s curator of birds, Harry Swarth. Brooks and Swarth are prominently remembered for an expedition that became instrumental in its breadth and
findings. In 1924, they embarked on a trip of several months to Atlin and travelled together by boat along the British Columbia coastline up to Alaska, making stops to collect specimens and record observations, until Skagway. With a railway detour from Skagway to Carcross, the pair resumed seafaring to their ultimate destination of Atlin.

Amongst extensive travels, Brooks sustained detailed observations and notes of species in North America abroad, even during wartime (as evidenced by sketches drawn while immersed in the trenches). Brooks continuously identified species and reported his observations, even in casual correspondence, simply due to an ever-present awe-inspired fascination. He met with experts and contemporaries in the field exhaustively, presumably sharing methods, research, and observations. Meticulous and punctilious for detail, with a penchant for creative liberties where appropriate, particularly evident in his artwork, Brooks devoted himself to accurate depictions and representation. Accordingly, he was often called upon to peer-review articles and academic work. In contrast to other contributors from the field of his time such as Fuertes, who focused on the primary subject of the painting, Brooks was lauded for the specific attention he paid to the background milieu and environment in addition to the foreground specimens. True to form, Brooks turned down numerous job offers throughout his life in favor of a more freeform lifestyle, which he found more gratifying than a rigid occupation. Evidently, Allan Brooks is set apart from the many naturalists of his time as a staunch advocate for precision in two arenas that significantly interconnected—one that upholds artistic integrity as epitomized in his paintings and the other that represents a well-founded reverence for scientific discipline.


Scope and Contents
The Allan C. Brooks papers include one bound volume of field notes and two bound volumes of bird catalogues that list the specimens collected over the course of Brooks’ career. Furthermore, the collection houses 42 original paintings, 38 of which are definitively attributed to Brooks and 4 that are possibly his work. The majority of the paintings are commissions requested by Grinnell for his publications: 17 paintings for plates in Wildlife of the Yosemite published in 1924 and 16 paintings for the two volumes of Grinnell’s 1937 work Fur-bearing Mammals of California. The remaining artwork was involved in various other publications by Grinnell and his colleagues. In addition to field notes and artwork, there is a series of correspondence between Brooks and colleagues of the MVZ. Correspondence generally describes transactional logistics, such as commissions and transfer of specimens. Topics discussed also detail specimen observation, collection, scientific taxonomy, and article consultation. Personal anecdotes, biographical descriptions, and travel experiences are also transcribed. The bulk of correspondence involves Brooks exchanging with Grinnell, Swarth, or Dixon. Some correspondence is also exchanged between other members of the Brooks family and the MVZ.

Related Archival Materials
Correspondence by and to Allan Brooks dating before 1930 can be found in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology historical correspondence 1908-1930 collection (MVZA.MSS.0117).

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Biological specimens--Identification
Birds--California--Identification
Birds--Canada, Western--Identification
Correspondence
Field notes
Scientific illustrations (images)
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Correspondence

Box 2, Folder 1  Correspondence 1931-1933
Box 2, Folder 2  Correspondence 1934-1937
Box 2, Folder 3  Correspondence 1938-1941
Box 2, Folder 4  Correspondence 1942-1946
Box 2, Folder 5  Allan C. Brooks and Allan C. Brooks Jr. Correspondence 1939-1946
Box 2, Folder 6  Allan C. Brooks Jr. Correspondence 1955-1966
Box 2, Folder 7  Marjorie Brooks (Mrs. Allan Brooks) Correspondence 1946-1955

Box 1, Folder 1  Allan Brooks field notes 1867-1944
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 1.0 Folder

Oversize 1, Folder 1  Allan Brooks bird catalogue 1877-1945
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 1.0 Folder

Oversize 1, Folder 2  Allan Brooks bird catalogue 2 1873-1945
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 1.0 Folder

Paintings

Oversize 5

Quail Hybrids 3 1911
Dimensions note: 8" x 11 15/16" (HxW)

Oversize 2

Young Bohemian Waxwings 5 1922
Dimensions note: 12 1/2" x 8 1/8" (HxW)
Publications note

Frame 1

8 Pocket Gophers 6 1926
Dimensions note: 14 1/2" x 10 1/16" (HxW)
Publications note

252: 1 plate.

Oversize 5

Foot of Trumpeter Swan 11 undated
Dimensions note: 7 1/16" x 10 1/8" (HxW)

Oversize 5

California Quail, Male and Female 12 undated
Dimensions note: 7 1/16" x 10 3/16" (HxW)

Oversize 5

Short-eared Owl 13 undated
Dimensions note: 7 1/16" x 10 3/16" (HxW)

Oversize 5

Young Gray Plover 14 1931
Dimensions note: 7 1/16" x 10 1/16" (HxW)

Frame 2

Song Sparrows of California 15 1923
Dimensions note: 14 3/8" x 10 1/8" (HxW)
Publications note

Oversize 2

Golden-crowned Sparrows 17 1926
Dimensions note: 14 9/10" x 9 15/16" (HxW)
Publications note

Oversize 4

California Spotted Skunk and San Diego Spotted Skunk 18 1937
Dimensions note: 15" x 11" (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 2

**Water Ouzel** 19 1924

Dimensions note: 7 3/8" x 11 1/16" (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 2

**Band-tailed Pigeon** 20 1924

Dimensions note: 14 1/4" x 9 7/8" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 3

**Sierra Nevada Rosy Finch** 21 1920

Dimensions note: 11 5/16" x 9" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 4

**Townsend Solitaire, Russet-backed Thrush, and Sierra Hermit Thrush** 22 1920

Dimensions note: 13 13/16" x 9 1/4" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 5

**Warblers of the Yosemite Section** 23 1920

Dimensions note: 11 5/8" x 8 13/16" (HxW)

Publications note

Frame 6

Some Small Birds of the Yosemite Forests 24 1920

Dimensions note: 13 7/8" x 9 3/8" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 7

Family Group of Williamson Sapsuckers 25 1920

Dimensions note: 14 3/16" x 9 15/16" (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 3

Sierra Golden-mantled and Belding Ground Squirrels 26 1924

Dimensions note: 6 1/2" x 8 5/8" (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 3

Southern Sierra Marmot 27 1924

Dimensions note: 6 1/4" x 9 1/16" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 8

Chipmunks of the Yosemite Section 28 1924

Dimensions note: 15" x 11" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 9

Woodpeckers of the Yosemite Section 29 1920
Frame 10

**Coral King Snake** 30 1924

Dimensions note: 9 1/8" x 13 1/8" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 19

**Some Sparrows of the Yosemite Region** 31 1924

Dimensions note: 11 3/8" x 9" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 11

**Adult and Young Western Skink** 32 1924

Dimensions note: 8 3/16" x 9" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 12

**Cassin and California Purple Finches and California Linnet** 33 1919

Dimensions note: 12 1/4" x 9 3/8" (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 5

**The Principal Diurnal Birds of Prey of the Yosemite Region, as seen overhead in flight** 34 1924

Dimensions note: 12 1/16" x 8 7/8" (HxW)

Publications note

Oversize 5

The Principal Diurnal Birds of Prey of the Yosemite Region, as seen overhead in flight 35 1924

Dimensions note: 12 1/8” x 9 5/16” (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 13

California River Otter and California Mink 37 1937

Dimensions note: 14 1/2” x 10 7/8” (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 14

3 Skunks: Arizona striped skunk, Great Basin striped skunk, Northern California striped skunk 38 1937

Dimensions note: 14” x 11 1/16” (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 15

Badger 39 1937

Dimensions note: 9 7/8” x 12 3/8” (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 3

Sierra Nevada Black Bear 40 1937

Dimensions note: 15 3/4” x 11 5/8” (HxW)

Publications note

California Ring-tailed Cat and California Raccoon 41 1937

Dimensions note: 14 1/8" x 9 11/16" (HxW)

Publications note

Sierra Nevada Pine Marten, Mountain Weasel in Winter, Moutain Weasel in Summer 42 1937

Dimensions note: 15" x 11 3/4" (HxW)

Publications note

Fisher 43 1937

Dimensions note: 14 1/4" x 10 1/8" (HxW)

Publications note

Southern Wolverine 44 1937

Dimensions note: 14 1/2" x 10 5/8" (HxW)

Publications note

Southern Sea Otter 45 1937

Dimensions note: 10 5/8" x 14 1/2" (HxW)

Publications note
Golden Beaver 46 1937

Dimensions note: 15 7/8" x 12" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 20

California Grey Fox, Sierra Nevada Red Fox, Desert Kit Fox 47 1937

Dimensions note: 14 1/16" x 10 1/8" (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 4

California Valley Coyote, Mountain Coyote 48 1937

Dimensions note: 16" x 11 1/2" (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 3

California Mountain Lion 49 1937

Dimensions note: 15 1/4" x 12" (HxW)

Publications note


Oversize 3

California Wildcat (Bobcat) 50 1937

Dimensions note: 14 7/8" x 11" (HxW)

Publications note


Frame 18

Colorado River Muskrat 51 1937
Dimensions note: 15" x 10 7/8" (HxW)

Publications note