
Finding Aid to the Bird Egg Collections Papers, 1883-2004 LA.2019.1003

Finding Aid prepared by Sarah Thornton
San Diego Natural History Museum Research Library
2019-10-21
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Language of Material: English

Contributing Institution: San Diego Natural History Museum Research Library

Title: Bird Egg Collections Papers

Identifier/Call Number: LA.2019.1003

Physical Description: .5 Linear Feet 7 files of textual materials, including correspondence, memos, catalogs, inventories, notes, and other materials.

Date (inclusive): 1883-2004

Abstract: The Bird Egg Collections Papers consists of correspondence, memos, catalogs, inventories, notes, and other materials from 1883-2004 related to the oological collections and collectors at San Diego Natural History Museum. The bulk of the collection pertains to the Bancroft Egg Collection and its eventual transfer to the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology.

Storage Unit: 365

Storage Unit: Artifact Shelf

Scope and Contents

The collection contains correspondence, papers, and other materials related to the San Diego Natural History Museum's oological collections and collectors between 1883-2004. The bulk of the collection documents the transition of ownership and possession of the Bancroft Bird Egg Collection between 1931-1970, including its deposit with the San Diego Natural History Museum in 1941 and its eventual transfer to the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology. Also included are materials on the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, and animal specimen sales catalogs from 1883-1941. Some papers relating to Albert M. Ingersoll are also included.

Biographical / Historical

Egg collecting, also known as oology, was a popular form of natural history collecting in the nineteenth-century. As ornithology began to formalize as a scientific discipline in the late 1800s, commercial egg collecting was considered integral to ornithological research. Hobbyists utilized catalogs and lists advertising bird eggs, skins and nests for sale or trade to build their collections. However, a rise in popular interest in bird protection, fueled by the extinction of certain zoological species such as the Passenger Pigeon, led to stricter restrictions on the collection of animal specimens. By the end of the Second World War, egg collecting had declined.

Albert Mills Ingersoll (1857-1954) collected eggs across the United States and across 24 California counties in particular. Among his most notable finds are a set of spotted owl eggs and a California Condor egg. Ingersoll served as Honorary Curator of Birds Eggs and Nests at the San Diego History Museum between the 1920s and the 1940s. His personal collection, which includes bird skins, nests, and eggs, is located at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology.

Griffing Bancroft (1875-1955), the son of historian Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832-1918), was an ornithologist and oologist. Bancroft collected one of the largest private egg collections in the country prior to WWII. In the 1940s, Bancroft placed the collection with the San Diego Society of Natural History. When the U.S. Navy took over use of the museum's building in 1943, Bancroft placed the collection with Ed Newton Harrison (1914-2002), a businessman and fellow collector of bird eggs, skins and nests.

In 1956, Harrison founded the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (WVZ) as a national repository for egg and nest collections. In 1970 San Diego Natural History Museum administrators arranged for a permanent loan transfer of the Bancroft Egg Collection to WVZ.

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open to researchers by appointment. Contact the Research Library Director, San Diego Natural History Museum.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Bird Egg Collections Papers (LA 2019.1003). Research Library, San Diego Natural History Museum.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Birds -- Eggs

Birds -- Nests

Birds -- Eggs -- Collectors and collecting

Zoological specimens -- Catalogs

Bancroft, Griffing, 1879-1955
Ingersoll, A. M., (Albert Mills), 1857-1954
Harrison, Ed Newton, 1914-2002
Abbott, Clinton G. (Clinton Gilbert), 1881-1946
Jehl, Joseph R. , Jr., 1935-
Hall, L. S. (Linnea Suzanne)
Clark, Mary Hollis, 1921-2010
Sefton, Joseph W., Jr., 1881-1966
Huey, Laurence M. (Laurence Markham), 1892-1963
Orcutt, Charles Russell, 1864-1929
Bent, Arthur Cleveland, 1866-1954
Kiff, Lloyd F.
Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (U.S.)
Hager, Michael W.

Box 365, folder 1

Bancroft Egg Collection Papers 1940-1970 1940-1955

Scope and Contents

Correspondence, copies of legal documents and other materials between 1940-1970 regarding the agreement between Bancroft and Harrison whereby Harrison would take possession and provide care for the Bancroft Egg Collection until and after Bancroft's death.

Box 365, Folder 2

Bancroft Egg Collection, Transfer to WFVZ 1969-1971

Scope and Contents

Correspondence, memoranda, and inventories regarding the Bancroft Egg Collection between 1969-1971, which document the negotiation of its transfer to Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology. Correspondence is primarily to and from Joseph R. Jehl, curator of Birds and Mammals at the San Diego Natural History Museum; Lloyd F. Kiff, of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology; and Ed N. Harrison. Also included are several inventories drawn up of the collection, including a list of items requested for return from WFVZ as part of a representative sample of the collection. One list includes handwritten notes on the inventory, probably by Dr. Jehl.

Box 365, Folder 3

Bancroft Egg Collection Documents 1931-1976 1931-1951

Scope and Contents

Copies of correspondence, reports and meeting minutes collected from various sources by the business administrator of the San Diego Natural History Museum and provided to an attorney with Luce, Forward, Hamilton and Scripps. The papers pertain to Bancroft's donation of the Egg Collection to the San Diego Natural History Museum, and the subsequent agreement between Bancroft and Harrison that Harrison would take possession of the collection and make provisions for its care until and after Bancroft's death. Includes copied correspondence to and from Clinton G. Abbott and J.W. Sefton, Jr., both directors of the San Diego Natural History Museum; Griffing Bancroft; and Ed N. Harrison. Also includes copies of minutes of the Director's meetings of the San Diego Natural History Museum between 1931-1951 pertaining to the board's deliberations and decisions about the Bancroft Egg Collection.

Box 365, Folder 4

Inquiry Into Bancroft Egg Collection Transfer 1943-2004 2004

Scope and Contents

Correspondence and documents regarding the status of the 1969-1971 transfer of the Harrison Egg Collection to Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology. Correspondence is predominantly from 2004 between Michael W. Hager, President of the San Diego Natural History Museum; and Linnea S. Hall, Executive Director of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology. Copies of older correspondence between 1943-1970 are also included, as well as copies of San Diego Natural History Museum Board of Directors' meeting minutes, a copy of the original 1945 agreement between Bancroft and Harrison, and a statement written in 1976 by Mary H. Clark, a longtime volunteer of the Natural History Museum, regarding her visit to WFVZ. Other materials include brochures about WFVZ, a brief biography of Ed N. Harrison printed from WFVZ's website, and a photocopy of a memorial biography, "In Memoriam: Ed Newton Harrison, 1914-2002" printed in the journal *Auk* in 2003.

Box 365, Folder 5

Undated Bird and Egg Collection Lists n.d.

Scope and Contents

This file includes three inventories or lists of birds and eggs. A field check-list of birds of San Diego County, California, compiled by J.R. Jehl, Jr. and R.G. McCaskie and published by the San Diego Natural History Museum after July, 1968 is included. The checklist contains checkmarks and other inscriptions and is attached to a hand-written list of birds. A second list itemizes specimens that should be returned to the museum by Harrison. Two other lists, displaying different information, are each titled "Rough Inventory of Egg Collection." One is 11 pages and is inscribed "sent to Harrison." The other is 36 pages long and is organized by display case numbers.

Box 365, Folder 6

Animal Specimen Catalogs 1883-1941

Scope and Contents

Catalogs and price lists of animal specimens, including mammals, bird eggs and bird skins, from North America and Manchuria. Includes an 1883 catalog of birds' skins and eggs from the Natural History Store of Southwick and Jencks, Providence, Rhode Island; an 1885 catalog of American Birds' Eggs for sale by F.T. Pember of New York; a 1913 price list of British birds' eggs and skins sold by Charles Jefferys of Bath, England; a 1905 Standard Catalogue of North American Birds' Eggs, inscribed with L.M. Huey's name. The folder also contains an 1887 list of oologists and ornithologists of the United States and Canada, compiled by Henry K. Coale. A checking list of North American birds used by A.C. Bent after 1883 is also included. Two catalogues are accompanied by brief correspondence to Charles R. Orcutt, 1889, regarding potential purchases by Orcutt. Lists of mammals, birds, bird eggs and other plant and mineral specimens from Manchuria include one from Compagnie Orientale Francaise, Ltd., 1938; and four from Michael A. Weymarn between 1937-1940. The file also contains other undated catalogs and lists from North America.

Box 365, Folder 7

A.M. Ingersoll Papers 1923-1935

Scope and Contents

Correspondence and other materials of Albert M. Ingersoll between 1923-1935. Includes materials regarding his contribution to "The Birds of California" publication, and correspondence pertaining to his election as a Patron of the San Diego Society of Natural History.

Box 365, Folder 8

Correspondence Regarding Bancroft Egg Collection 1944-1951

Scope and Contents

Correspondence among Griffing Bancroft, Bancroft's attorneys, trustee Ed N. Harrison, and San Diego Society of Natural History president Arthur F. Fischer.

Box 365, Folder 9

Bancroft Egg Collection Documents 1941-1970

Scope and Contents

Includes agreements and related correspondence regarding the disposition the Bancroft Egg Collection. Includes rough inventory, list of requested subcollection. Correspondents include Griffing Bancroft, Clinton G. Abbott, Joseph Sefton, Jr., Ed N. Harrison, and Joseph R. Jehl Jr.

Item Artifact
Shelf,
Drawer Shelf 5

Albert M. Ingersoll Portrait Plaque After 1954

Physical Description: 1 ItemPortrait of Albert Mills Ingersoll (1857-1954).Colored photograph, 3 x 4 in., matted and framed for use as a display plaque.Typescript on mat describes his life and contributions to the San Diego Natural History's bird egg collection.9.75 x 12.75 in.