E.L. Davis Collection

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2017
Descriptive Summary

Title: E.L. Davis Collection

Dates: 1947-1970

Collection Number: 2016.002

Creator/Collector: Emma Lou Davis (1905-1988) San Diego Museum of Man

Extent: 6.5 linear feet

Repository: San Diego Museum of Man
San Diego, California 92101

Abstract: Professional papers of archaeologist and curator Emma Lou Davis (1905-1988), including excavation notes, correspondence, and aerial photographs.

Language of Material: English

Access

The collection is open to on-site researchers. Research visits must be arranged with the collections department in advance. One folder containing records of a site with human remains has been restricted in accordance with museum policy. Additional permissions are required for access.

Publication Rights

The museum can only claim physical ownership of the collection. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the San Diego Museum of Man as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the researcher.

Preferred Citation

E.L. Davis Collection. San Diego Museum of Man

Acquisition Information

Davis was a former curator whose papers were retained by staff and not formally accessioned until 2016.

Biography/Administrative History

Dr. Emma Lou Davis (1905-1988) was an anthropologist and San Diego Museum of Man curator who studied Paleo-Indian archaeology in the California deserts. Born in Indiana, Davis had a successful career in art and design which led her to travel all over the United States, Russia, and China. Davis worked in several American art museums before serving as an aircraft designer during World War II and becoming a furniture designer after the war. She received her Ph.D. in anthropology in 1964 and was curator of the San Diego Museum of Man (then the San Diego Museum) from 1966 to 1971. With her excavations at China Lake, Davis presented evidence that southern California had been inhabited much earlier than previously estimated. She was a proponent of an interdisciplinary approach that combined anthropology, geology, paleoclimatology, and other fields. Davis also criticized the archaeological paradigm that approached sites as groups of artifacts of a common style. Instead, she focused on the religions and material cultures of people who had produced the artifacts. Dr. Davis founded the Great Basin Foundation and authored over 70 books and articles. Today, she is widely considered an important figure in bringing scientific rigor and credibility to Paleo-Indian archaeology in California.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection comprises E.L. Davis’s professional papers, which primarily concern southern California. Her field notebooks and excavation notes constitute a large portion of the collection. Some of these notebooks include detailed records of the artifacts excavated at each site and the photographs taken at each site. The collection also contains data from Davis’s research about the lifeways of Diegueño (now Kumeyaay) communities in southern California, including a notebook and punch cards with further data and notes. The collection also contains correspondence, publication drafts, and aerial photographs.

Indexing Terms

Anthropology, Prehistoric
Archaeology
California, Southern
Museum curators
Paleo-Indians
Diegueño Indians
Kamia Indians

Contents List