Finding aid for the Henry E. Roberts Collection

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Finding aid for the Henry E. Roberts Collection

Collection number: SEKI 001

Museum and Archives
Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks
Three Rivers, California

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Henry E. Roberts collection
Dates: ca. 1888-1960
Collection number: SEKI 001
Creator: Roberts, Henry E. (Henry Edmund), 1869-1961
Collector: Lindsay, Edna Roberts, 1879-1968
Collection Size: 9 linear feet (22 archives boxes)
Repository: Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, Museum and Archives
Three Rivers, CA 93271-9700

Abstract: Henry E. Roberts was photo concessioner for General Grant National Park from 1900-1930. His collection of glass plate negatives, cellulose negatives, prints, stereographs, slides and correspondence weaves together different stages in Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks history. The wealth of imagery includes park scenery, snapshots of life at Grant Grove Village, scrapbooks and correspondence documenting the life of the photographer and his family, and a number of early views of sequoia logging in and around Converse Basin. For the last of these alone, the collection is of considerable historic importance, but taken as a whole, the collection is irreplaceable for the breadth of view it offers into the parks early years of development.

Physical location: Ash Mountain Basement.
Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access
Collection is open for research by appointment.
Publication Rights
Many collections are former federal government records and are in the public domain. Other collections are from private sources; copyright has been transferred to the NPS on most. Some collections have publication restrictions. Staff will assist researchers in determining copyright status of selected materials. Researchers are required to properly credit all materials used. The researcher assumes responsibility for acquiring copyright permissions when needed.

Preferred Citation
Henry E. Roberts collection, SEKI 001. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks.

Biography / Administrative History
Henry E. Roberts, operated the Grant Grove Studio from 1914 to 1935, selling images of park scenes to visitors and in large measure determining the public image of General Grant National. Roberts was born in Osceola, Iowa on September 10, 1869 and came west in the 1890s. By the turn of the twentieth century, he was in California, keeping bees in the former Russian colony of Sebastopol in Sonoma County. In the summer of 1904, he and his wife, Edna, set up a temporary photo studio in a tent at Millwood located in the mountains of Fresno. From here, he documented the devastation taking place with the sequoia logging operations at Converse Basin. By the end of the decade he had opened a permanent studio in Corona, in western Riverside County, producing photographic portraits and selling photographic supplies. Beginning in
1914, Roberts spent twenty-one summers at General Grant National Park. During the off-season, he would return to the studio in Corona. In later years when he had sold the studio, Roberts traveled with his second wife, Nelle, throughout Southern California setting up temporary portrait studios in places like Needles, Barstow, San Bernardino, and Lancaster. While in the park, Roberts took a number of trips into the Kings Canyon high country documenting the spectacular scenery of the area that would become, in 1940, Kings Canyon National Park. In 1935, Roberts left General Grant and returned to Corona. He briefly operated a malt shop, but soon reopened his photo studio. In an unpublished autobiographical fragment, Roberts writes of his photography: [F]or thirty-five years or more it was my business as well as my hobby. It was my pride and joy in life. The satisfaction I derived from making pictures was not to much from the sale of them, although this was a material necessity, as in the triumph of achievement. By the 1950s, Roberts had retired. In a 1959 note he left his photographic legacy to his only son, Harold Edmond (Eddie) Roberts: It is also my wish that you have all my negatives (glass and film), some are good but many are too old to be of much interest today. They are tales from a forgotten past. On May 30, 1961, H. E. Roberts died in Inglewood, California.

Scope and Content of Collection
The Roberts Collection consists of 211 glass plate negatives of various sizes, 635 nitrate and acetate negatives, 464 loose miscellaneous photographs, 140 stereographs, 56 color and black and white slides, and 151 pieces of correspondence. The materials describe Roberts career as photo concessioner for General Grant National Park, now Kings Canyon National Park. The negatives and prints, which depict the history of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park cover different decades, starting with the logging era in Converse Basin and ending with the creation of Kings Canyon National Park in the 1940s. The logging images illustrate a myriad of aspects of the logging process, which was specific to sequoias, as well as the logging lifestyle and tourism of the time. A large portion of the images from within the parks are landscapes, most of Kings Canyon National Park. The majority of pictures from General Grant National Park are of the Giant Sequoias, many of which are no longer standing. Roberts photographs also depict the first burst of tourism with in the parks, which was in part fuel by the Giant Sequoias. A small portion of the images are of flora and fauna from Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park and various construction projects conducted during Roberts time there.

The negatives and prints depict Roberts and his family, various stages in the early years of Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park development, and a handful of family trips taken outside the Central Valley. The family photographs and negatives are mostly portraits of Henry Roberts, his wife Edna and their son Edmund. Some of Roberts commercial photography features his family as the subjects.

The 140 Stereographs seem to depict one specific trip Henry Roberts and his wife Edna took to Kings Canyon. Most of the stereographs are from what is now known as the Rae Lakes Loops region.

The black and white slides are not strictly unique images but are mostly duplicates of negatives or prints from the collection. Some of the slides are photographs of photographs tacked on to a board.

A small portion of the negatives, prints, and glass plates are not Roberts photos. Some of the logging photos are taken by the photographer Charles C. Curtis or A. R. Moore. The photographs bare the photographers signatures, so we can be sure they are not photos of Roberts.

The correspondence and personal materials are primarily that of Henry Roberts wife Edna Roberts. The letters include letters from her family on the topic of various legal issues concerning land in Alaska which had belonged to her Uncle Charles McNett. A small group of the letters are written to Edna Roberts mother, Papira Bartlett, and her uncle, William McNett, from lawyers concerning the previously mentioned land disputes. The second portion of the letters is merely correspondence between family members. The personal papers include the legal documents and divorce papers of Henry and Edna as well as immigration documents of Ednas new husband J. Ross Lindsay, who was Canadian.

Arrangement
The Roberts Collection is organized by a classification system which breaks down the collection by type of material, size, and category.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
- Kings Canyon National Park (Calif.)
- Sequoia National Park (Calif.)
- Logging--California--History.
- Logging--California--Sequoia National Forest.
- Giant sequoia
- Sierra Nevada (Calif. and Nev.)
**Series 1. Glass Plates 1888-1930**

**Subseries 1.1 Small Glass Plates 1888-1930**

Physical Description: 127 items.

Subseries Scope and Content Summary

The small glass plate negatives of the Roberts Collection cover various periods of Henry Roberts' time as photo concessioner at General Grant National Park, now Kings Canyon National Park. The small glass plates vary in size and while most are black and white, a select few are hand painted in color.

Arrangement


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**Box: 3-4**

**Subseries 1.2 Medium Glass Plates 1888-1930**

Physical Description: 57 items.

Subseries Scope and Content Summary

The medium glass plate negatives of the Roberts Collection cover various periods of Henry Roberts' time as photo concessioner at General Grant National Park, now Kings Canyon National Park. Most of medium glass are black and white, a select few are hand painted in color.

Arrangement

**Subseries 1.3 Large Glass Plates 1888-1930**

**Physical Description:** 27 items.

**Subseries Scope and Content Summary**

The large glass plate negatives of the Roberts Collection cover various periods of Henry Roberts' time as photo concessioner at General Grant National Park, now Kings Canyon National Park. Most of large glass are black and white, a select few are hand painted in color.

**Arrangement**


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**Box: 1-3 Series 3. Prints 1888-1950**

**Physical Description:** 464 items.

**Series Scope and Content Summary**

The Roberts collection prints consist of about 464 miscellaneous prints which do not match to any negatives. The prints fit into various sub categories ranging from scenes inside the Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park to portraits of Roberts' family. The prints are various in size. Most of them are black and white; a few oversize prints are hand colored.

**Arrangement**


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**Box: 1 Subseries 3.1 Small Prints 1888-1950**

**Physical Description:** 374 items.

**Subseries Scope and Content Summary**

The small prints consist of about 374 miscellaneous prints which do not match to any negatives. The prints fit into various sub categories ranging from scenes inside the Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park to portraits of Roberts' family. All of the small prints are black and white.

**Arrangement**


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**Box: 2-3 Subseries 3.2 Medium Prints 1888-1950**

**Physical Description:** 80 items.

**Subseries Scope and Content Summary**

The medium prints consist of about 80 miscellaneous prints which do not match to any negatives. The prints fit into various sub categories ranging from scenes inside the Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park to portraits of Roberts' family. All of the small prints are black and white.

**Arrangement**

Subseries 3.3 Large Medium 1888-1950

Box: 3

Physical Description: 10 items.

Subseries Scope and Content Summary
The large prints consist of about 10 oversize miscellaneous prints which do not match to any negatives. The prints fit into various sub categories ranging from scenes inside the Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park to portraits of Roberts' family. The large prints vary in size. Most of them are black and white; a few oversize prints are hand painted.

Arrangement

Box: 1-3


Physical Description: 300 items.

Series Scope and Content Summary
The stereographs of the Roberts Collection cover primarily one trip of Henry Roberts to the Kings Canyon region. The stereographs are all one size. All are black and white.

Arrangement

Box: 1

Series 5. Slides 1888-1950

Physical Description: 30 items.

Series Scope and Content Summary
The Roberts slide collection consists of about 30 slides which vary in subject from photographs of prints to family vacations. The slides are mostly black and white, a few are color.

Box: 1-2

Series 6. Correspondence 1888-1950

Physical Description: 151 items.

Series Scope and Content Summary
The correspondence of the Roberts Collection consists mostly of letters written to and from Henry Roberts' wife Edna Roberts. There are a few personal documents in the correspondence collection as well, including Henry Roberts and Edna Roberts divorce papers.

Arrangement
Organized alphabetically by last name, then chronologically.

Box: 1-3

Series 7. H.E. Roberts letters and articles 1924-1944

Physical Description: 236 items.

Series Scope and Content Summary
This series consists of material kept by Harold Roberts, the grandson of H.E. Roberts. Principally letters written by his grandfather, the collection also includes photographs and park ephemera. It dates from 1924 to 1944.
Subseries 7.1 Letters 1924-1944

Physical Description: 215 items.
Subseries Scope and Content Summary
The letters consists of correspondence between Henry Roberts and his son Edmund Roberts.
Arrangement
Chronological.

Subseries 7.2 Prints and ephemera 1924-1944

Physical Description: 21 items.
Subseries Scope and Content Summary
This series consists of photographs and park ephemera.