Finding Aid to the T. A. (Theodore Arthur) Willard Collection MS.234

Finding aid prepared by Holly Rose Larson
Autry National Center, Braun Research Library
234 Museum Drive
Los Angeles, CA, 90065-5030
323-221-2164
room@theautry.org
2012 September 26
Title: T. A. (Theodore Arthur) Willard Collection
Identifier/Call Number: MS.234
Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Braun Research Library
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 6.0 Linear feet (7 boxes)
Date (inclusive): 1756-1938
Language: English, Mayan languages, Spanish.
Abstract: T. A. (Theodore Arthur) Willard (1862-1943) was an inventor, musician, and amateur archeologist. Willard published several books on ancient Mayan culture in the 1930s. This collection of papers dating from 1756-1938 and regarding Mayan languages, Chichen Itza, and the Cocom family include correspondence and manuscripts by and to T. A. Willard, correspondence and papers collected by T. A. Willard, original artworks by and collected by T. A. Willard, and photographic negatives and positives from his 30 journeys to Mexico and Central America.
creator: Martínez Hernández, Juan
creator: Willard, T. A. (Theodore Arthur), 1862-1943
Access
Collection is open for research. Appointments to view materials are required. To make an appointment please visit http://theautry.org/research/research-rules-and-application or contact library staff at rroom@theautry.org. An item-level inventory is available from library staff.
Acquisition
Donation in memory of Theodore A. Willard by his wife Florence V. Willard, 1943 May 21.
Related Archival Materials
Edna Robb Webster Papers, 1906-1979, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.237.
Preferred citation
T. A. (Theodore Arthur) Willard Collection, 1756-1938, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MSA.234; [folder number] [folder title][date].
Scope and contents
This collection of papers includes correspondence and manuscripts by and to T. A. Willard, correspondence and papers collected by T. A. Willard, original artworks by and collected by T. A. Willard, and photographic negatives and positives from his 30 journeys to Mexico and Central America. Documents are often undated, but dated materials are from 1756 to 1938. Materials in this collection refer mostly to the Mayan languages, Chichen Itza, and the Cocom family. Papers include codices for translation between English, Mayan languages, and Spanish; correspondence; manuscripts; notes; pamphlets, and reports. Authors and correspondents other than Willard include Edward Thompson Case, Oliver Drake, Juan Martinez-Hernandez, Don Juan Pio Perez, Henry R. Wagner, Marjorie Ellen Webster, and Florence V. Willard. Photographs portray the Palace of Kukulkan, the Uxmal Stela of Itzamna, and the Great Ball Court of the Lower Temple. Some of the photographs have been worked into with ink and paint.
Biographical note
Theodore Arthur Willard was an engraver, inventor (arguably a mechanical genius), musician, and amateur archeologist. Willard was born in Castle Rock, Minnesota on December 10, 1862. His mother died in childbirth, and a strained relationship resulted between Theodore and his father. When Willard was four or five years old, his father gave him away to a childless farming couple, and Willard could only attend school in the winters when the farm was non-operational. Willard had artistic and mechanical talent besides his drive for knowledge, and graduated second in his class. After excelling in school, he worked for his eldest brother, learning to be a wood engraver. Using his skills as an engraver, he started experimenting with battery cells. In 1886 he went to Cleveland, Ohio, where he lived with his uncle Archibald M. Willard (the artist who painted the famous "Spirit of '76" portrait) and in the 1890s founded the Willard Electric Battery Company, which later became the Willard Storage Battery Company, a hugely successful and profitable company. Shortly after he left Minneapolis, Willard changed his name to T. A. Willard. He was married four times; he married for the last time in 1914, to Florence Voorhees, his former secretary.
Willard became interested in the pre-Colombian art of Central America, and following his retirement from business in 1928, he focused his life entirely on the pursuit of this interest. He traveled to the Yucatan 27 times, totaling more than 8 years spent in the region. He became good friends with Edward H. Thompson, the American consul who owned the property upon which Chichen Itza stood. Willard assisted with his dredging of the Sacred Well at Chichen Itza and helped fund much of
Thompson's work at Chichen Itza until Thompson's death in 1935. Willard took extensive photographs of the excavations, most of which were destroyed along with his photographic lab, during an attack on Thompson's hacienda. Willard wrote four popular books on the Maya which were a mix of fact and fiction intended to spark popular interest in the culture and history of the Mayan peoples.

Willard passed away at his Beverly Hills, California home on 1943 February 3.

References


Processing history
Initial processing by Braun Library Staff. Finding aid completed by Holly Rose Larson, NHPRC Project Archivist, 2012 September 26, made possible through grant funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

Use
Copyright has not been assigned to the Autry National Center. All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the Autry Archivist. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the Autry National Center as the custodian of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the reader.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Art, American
Central America -- Description and travel
Chichén Itzá Site (Mexico)
Correspondence
Manuscripts
Mayan languages -- Writing
Mexico -- Description and travel
Negatives
Photographs