Finding Aid to the Workman Family Collection MS.567

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Title: Workman Family Collection
Identifier/Call Number: MS.567
Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Braun Research Library
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 1.6 linear feet (1 scrapbook; 5 folders)
Date (inclusive): 1933-1956
Abstract: The Workman Family arrived in Los Angeles in 1841 and were among the first settlers to obtain a land grant from the Mexican government, the 48,790-acre Rancho La Puente. This is a collection of newspaper clippings from 1933-1956 chronicling the Workman Family. Includes a large red scrapbook which is the culmination of a newspaper serialization of the book entitled, "The City That Grew" by Boyle Workman, published in 1935.
creator: Workman, Boyle
Scope and Contents
This is a collection of newspaper clippings from 1933-1956 chronicling the Workman Family. Includes a large red scrapbook which is the culmination of a newspaper serialization of the book entitled, "The City That Grew" by Boyle Workman, published in 1935.
Processing history
Acquisition
Clippings donated by Mrs. John O. Wheeler, 1918 August 12. Later donations from F. W. Hodge, 1933 November through 1942 November.
Preferred citation
Workman Family Collection, 1933-1956, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.567; [folder number] [folder title][date].
Use
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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 list is available.
Biographical note
The Workman Family arrived in Los Angeles in 1841.
William Workman, with his friend and business partner, John Rowland, led a wagon train of settlers across more than a thousand miles of desert and mountain terrain from New Mexico to Southern California, arriving in La Puente Valley in November of 1841. They were among the first settlers to obtain a land grant from the Mexican government for properties being given away or sold at bargain prices as part of the secularization of Spanish missions. Their arrival in the valley was a watershed event, for they were the first white men to obtain title to the 48,790-acre Rancho La Puente and to develop it into a thriving agricultural enterprise.
Rowland, born to British parents who immigrated to New York, moved to Boston while still a young man. There he met a group of fur trappers and headed west, ultimately finding employment with the American Fur Company in Taos, New Mexico. There, he met William Workman, who was born in England but came to America and gravitated to Taos, where he ran a general store and grist mill.
Rowland and Workman traveled west from Taos, leading a group of several dozen other settlers from Missouri and New Mexico, in what was the first officially-documented immigrant wagon train comprised of people interested in new homes, scientific discovery, or adventure. The group traveled along the Rio Grande down the Chihuahua Trail, then to the Gila River and the Colorado River by way of Yuma. They took a roundabout route to avoid hostile Indians and only had one unpleasant encounter when the Indians tried to steal their horses and livestock. In November 1841, they reached San Gabriel via Cajon Pass. Both men were long used to Mexican customs, having lived for years in New Mexico and being married to Mexican
women, and not long after assuring California authorities that they would assimilate well into the new territory, they found out that a vast parcel of land named Rancho La Puente had not yet been allotted. Rowland applied on behalf of himself and Workman to Governor Juan B. Alvarado for the 48,790-acre land grant of the ranch, one of twenty-two ranches that had belonged to the San Gabriel Mission. Rowland and Workman had several factors on their side, including letters of recommendation from Padre Tomas Estenaga of the San Gabriel Mission and the Prefect of the Second District of California; their pledges to become Mexican citizens; their promise to hire local Native Americans; and their willingness to pay a thousand dollars in gold for taxes and assessments. On January 4, 1842, Governor Alvarado gave them preliminary title to the land. (It would be three more years before they would receive permanent title from Governor Pio Pico.) By the end of 1842, additional settlers from New Mexico had arrived to become part of the new ranching enterprise.

Rowland and Workman built stately adobe houses on the banks of San Jose Creek and soon established a successful ranching and farming operation. They raised cattle and sheep, grew wheat and processed it on-site at grist mills, and produced wool, wine, and brandies. In 1851, they decided to split their property, with Rowland taking about 29,000 acres on the east and Workman receiving the 20,000 acres on the west. Their land division was officially sanctioned only in 1867, following a circuitous route through the legal system. They continued to work their land successfully and showed particular prowess as winemakers; Rowland became the state’s first large-scale commercial wine manufacturer and Workman’s wine was shipped as far away as Boston. Both even survived a devastating drought during the 1860s that decimated much of their cattle herd.

Their luck diverged near the end of their lives, however. Rowland’s finances remained intact until his death in 1873, at which time his estate was bequeathed to his next of kin. Workman, however, had decided to start a bank in 1868 with his son-in-law, Francisco Temple. After the bank failed during the Panic of 1875, Workman, who had put up nearly all of his 20,000 acres as collateral, lost the property to Elias J. “Lucky” Baldwin, who had lent Workman money to start the bank. Devastated, Workman took his own life the following year.

Sources:

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Workman Family
Clippings
Land grants -- California
Los Angeles (Calif.)
Scrapbooks

Scrapbook
Scope and contents

Folder 1
Scope and contents
Workman-Rowland party of immigrants newspaper clippings, 1941. Material commemorates the arrival of the family in 1841. 4 clippings, including picture of Boyle Workman.

Folder 2
Scope and contents
Folder 3
Scope and contents
William Workman (circa 1877-1956) obituary Los Angeles Times March 22, 1956

Folder 4
Scope and contents
Boyle Workman (1868-December 25, 1942) obituary – 3 clippings – Los Angeles Times December 1942

Folder 5
Scope and contents