Finding Aid to the William Wolfskill 1830-1855 Ledgers MS.594

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Title: William Wolfskill 1830-1855 Ledgers
Identifier/Call Number: MS.594
Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Braun Research Library
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 0.4 linear feet (10 folders)
Date (inclusive): 1913-1955
Abstract: John and William Wolfskill were pioneers to California and New Mexico from Kentucky and Missouri in the 1830s. William Wolfskill is credited with being the first to ship California oranges as a commercial commodity. This collection contains one typed copy and one carbon copy of William Wolfskill’s dry goods store ledgers from 1830-1854, as well as biographical newspaper clippings on the Wolfskill family from 1913-1955.
creator: Wolfskill, William, 1798-1866

Biographical note
John and William Wolfskill were pioneers to California and New Mexico from Kentucky and Missouri in the 1830s. William Wolfskill is credited with being the first to ship California oranges as a commercial commodity.

William Wolfskill (1798, March 20 – 1866, October 3) was a cowboy and agronomist from Los Angeles, California, who was highly influential in the development of California’s agricultural industry in the 19th century. Arguably his greatest contribution to agriculture was the Valencia orange, which quickly became the most popular juice orange in America and led to the naming of Valencia, California.

In California, Wolfskill took advantage of the Mexican land ownership laws and became a pioneer of viticulture in Southern California. After acquiring land from the Mexican government where downtown Los Angeles now stands, he began growing grapevines. He eventually planted 32,000 vines on a 48 acre vineyard. Initially, he planted mission vines, but he experimented with other varietals later. At his death in 1866, he was producing 50,000 gallons of wine a year. He was, by far, the greatest producer of table grapes in California during the Mexican era and has been named by historians as one of the three most important men in the history of California viticulture.

Wolfskill is credited with starting the commercial citrus industry by selling a shipload of lemons to the gold miners for up to $1 apiece and shipping oranges the following year. He is also credited with building the first schooner in California.

Processing history

Scope and Contents
This collection contains one typed copy and one carbon copy of William Wolfskill’s dry goods store ledgers from 1830-1854, as well as biographical newspaper clippings on the Wolfskill family from 1913-1955. Ledgers were copied from the original account book by the courtesy of Mrs. Marcella Wolfskill Palethorpe, great-granddaughter of William Wolfskill. The copy was made by Madeline Amsden for the Southwest Museum research library. Ledgers are for Taos, New Mexico, 1830-1832, and for Wilmington, California, 1843-1854. The New Mexico ledger pages are in English, and the California ledger pages are in Spanish.

Acquisition
New Mexico ledger received in Library, 1941 April 18. California ledger received in Library, 1946. Other materials from donations from Charles Fletcher Lummis, 1913.

Preferred citation
William Wolfskill 1830-1855 Ledgers, 1913-1955, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.594; [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.
Subjects and Indexing Terms
Wolfskill Family
Wolfskill, John
Citrus fruit industry
Clippings
Dry goods stores
Frontier and pioneer life -- New Mexico
Frontier and pioneer life -- California
Ledgers
Merchants -- Southwest, New
Taos (N.M.)
Wilmington (Calif.)