John S. Armstrong Nursery Collection

1889-1984
Descriptive Summary

Title: John S. Armstrong Nursery Collection

Dates: 1889-1984

Collection Number: Consult library

Creator/Collector: Armstrong, John Samuel, 1865-1965

Repository: Armstrong Nurseries (Ontario, Calif.)

Extent: 66 containers, approximately 60 linear feet.

Abstract: The collection is a multi-media archive of the Armstrong Nurseries, Inc., with records dating from 1889 to 1984. Holdings include company records and marketing materials, approximately 14,000 photographs and negatives, motion picture films, sound recordings, and approximately 40 rolled sheets of maps and plans.

Language of Material: English

Access

Collection is open for research during the operating hours of the Robert E. Ellingwood Model Colony History Room, or by appointment.

Publication Rights

Consult library

Preferred Citation

John S. Armstrong Nursery Collection. Ontario City Library, Robert E. Ellingwood Model Colony History Room

Acquisition Information

The holdings were donated by Armstrong Nurseries (via Vice President for Research Jack Christensen), Mr. Jack Armstrong (via the Museum of History and Art, Ontario) and by Mr. Herbert Swim in 1985.

Biography/Administrative History

John Armstrong was born on October 11, 1865 in Brantford, Canada. After contracting tuberculosis, his doctor recommended moving to a warmer climate. He decided to head west and arrived in Upland on March 3, 1889. He found he liked working outdoors and learned the nursery business during his tenure at the Horsley and Eaton Nursery. He soon parted ways with Mssrs. Horsley and Eaton, starting his own nursery and recovering his health in the process. He also bought land and began cultivating grapes, fruit and citrus trees. In 1898, Armstrong bought three lots on D Street and Euclid Avenue from Andrew Chaffey for $112.00 each. This land became the original Armstrong Nursery. He started a mail order catalog of roses and fruit trees in 1902 that continues to this day. He continued buying acreage and selling plants, riding the ever-expanding demand for ornamental trees and shrubbery from the 1920's on. In the 1940's he pioneered the development of new varieties of roses, among them the Charlotte Armstrong, named for his first wife who died in 1947. More than 2,000,000 of this variety have been sold and it is the official flower of the city of Ontario. Though John Armstrong died in 1965, the company now has over 650 employees. Armstrong Garden Centers is the largest independent retail nursery company in the Western United States, specializing in the largest selection of roses (over 950 varieties), many developed exclusively by the company.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection consists of 60 linear feet of documents which include John S. Armstrong's memoirs, the Armstrong Nursery journals, ledgers, harvest books, diaries, maps and catalogs. There are also approximately 4000 photographs, 10,000 negatives, audio tapes, 16mm films and photographs of discontinued roses. The diaries contain the notes of hybridists Walter Lammerts, Herbert C. Swim, David L. Armstrong, and Jack C. Christensen written during their tenure in Armstrong's Research Department. Dr. Lammerts' notes on the hybridization of the Charlotte Armstrong Rose (Ontario's official flower) and Mr. Swim's notes on his prize-winning roses are included. These diaries date from 1938-1970.

Indexing Terms

Armstrong, John Samuel, 1865-1965

Armstrong Nursery--History

Ontario (Calif.)--History

Armstrong Collection Container List