Guide to the Trask Family Chinese Correspondence Collection MS 234

Finding aid prepared by Katrina White
Collection processed as part of grant project supported by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) with generous funding from The Andrew Mellon Foundation.
San Diego History Center Document Collection
1649 El Prado, Suite 3
San Diego, CA, 92101
619-232-6203
July 18, 2011
Title: Trask family Chinese Correspondence Collection
Identifier/Call Number: MS 234
Contributing Institution: San Diego History Center Document Collection
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 0.25 Linear feet (1 box)
Date (inclusive): 1946-1998
Abstract: This collection contains original correspondence written to the Trask family (Grover and Pauline Trask) from several Chinese Air Force personnel between 1946 and 1957, who had previously been stationed in San Diego. Some letters are written from China while others are written from various parts of the United States.
Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English and Chinese.
creator: Trask family
Conditions Governing Access
This collection is open for research.
Conditions Governing Use
The San Diego History Center (SDHC) holds the copyright to any unpublished materials. SDHC Library regulations do apply.
Processing Information
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Preferred Citation
Trask Family Chinese Correspondence Collection, MS 234, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA.
Arrangement
Items in this collection are arranged by subject.
Scope and Content
The collection contains original correspondence between Chinese Air Force personnel and the Trask family dating from 1946 to 1957. The correspondence is made up of 35 handwritten letters and one typed letter from five individual Chinese engineers addressed to the Trasks; no letters written by the Trasks are included in the collection. In most cases, the original envelopes with postage are included along with the letter. The letters were written following the engineers’ stay in San Diego from a range of locations including China, Taiwan, and other U.S. cities where they were later stationed. The correspondence is of a personal nature and reveals the close friendship between the Trasks and these individuals, as well as their thoughts on the political events of that period and on cultural similarities and differences between the U.S. and China. The majority of the correspondence (23 letters) is from Hsiou Tseng Wang. Hsiao Tseng Wang and Li Shen Wen, another Chinese engineer, were very good friends and referred to each other in letters as H.T. and L.S., respectively. All the men who wrote to the Trask family were acquainted with each other and would occasionally refer to one another in their letters.

The collection also includes photographs of several of the Chinese engineers. There is also an empty, oversized cloth envelope that was sent as a package by H.T. Wang to the Trasks. Finally, the collection includes typed “Memories” from Willard and Joyce Trask about Riverwalk and their family’s friendship with the Chinese residents there.

Biographical / Historical Notes
In 1943 twenty-one Chinese engineers from their national Air Force were sent to San Diego to study at Consolidated-Vultee Aircraft Corp (known as Convair). They comprised the single largest group at any single American aircraft plant, though there were about 62 such engineers scattered around the United States studying at 15 factories. In the U.S. by special arrangement between the Chinese and American governments, their job was to learn the practical and theoretical side of bomber production, since China had only a limited number of airplane factories that could only build fighter planes made from bamboo and plywood. China was totally dependent on other nations for its bomber-type aircraft. Though on a stipend from the Chinese government they were also considered regular employees at Convair and were paid regular salaries for their services. The head of the industrial education department was impressed by the engineers’ excellent work ethic and politeness.

The Second World War was somewhat of a watershed for the Chinese in San Diego when there was enough work for everyone and the Japanese became the ‘enemy.’ Reportedly, the air force personnel studying here during that time were well-received by the local community and from their own perspective their experiences in San Diego and elsewhere were
warm and positive, evidenced in how quickly they picked up the language, nuances and all, and were eager to take American culture home to their own families.

During the population boom in San Diego during the war, housing units were hastily built to house all the war workers from Convair and Boeing, and military personnel. Two such areas, at Congress Street and ‘Highway 8’ and at Midway Drive, were named “Riverlawn” and “Frontier” respectively. The owner and manager of the cafeteria at “Riverlawn” was Mr. Grover C. Trask, a local civic leader and president of the Progress & Prosperity Club of East San Diego. Trask was a central figure in the purchase of Camp Kearney for the army, was involved in real estate with O.W. Cotton, and worked for the Office of Price Administration during the war. Trask and his wife Pauline had two children, Willard W. Trask and Webster E. Trask. Mr. Trask and his family lived at the “Frontier” housing project but ate most of their meals at the “Riverlawn” cafeteria where they, particularly his wife Pauline, befriended some of the Chinese Air Force personnel working and studying at Convair. These friendships carried on for many years; they exchanged letters and gifts and some of the Chinese airmen made several visits to see the Trasks and San Diego once they were stationed elsewhere. Their correspondence, though mostly of a personal nature often touched upon important political events happening at the time, as well as the differences and similarities between American and Chinese culture.

Pauline Trask died in 1958. It appears that the family’s correspondence with the Chinese engineers had ended a year earlier in 1957. However, in 1998, Willard and Joyce Trask recorded their memories of the period, recalling the Frontier and Riverlawn residences and the Chinese Air Force personnel whom their family had befriended.

Immediate Source of Acquisition
Accession number 980311.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Arlington National Cemetery (Arlington, Va.).
California State Fair and Exposition.
Chen, Wan Ming
Chiang, Kai-shek, 1887-1975
China (Republic : 1949- ). Kong jun .
China. Kong jun.
Chou, Chang Li
Churchill, Winston, 1874-1965
Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation.
El Cortez Hotel.
Mare Island Naval Shipyard.
Quyuan
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945
Shen, Po Lin
Stilwell, Joseph Warren, 1883-1946
Trask family
Trask, Grover C.
Trask, Joyce
Trask, Pauline
Trask, Webster
Trask, Willard
United States. Air Force.
University of Michigan.
Wang, Hsieo-Yu
Wang, Hsiou Tseng
Wang, Su-Hua
Webster, Williard, Lt.
Wen, Li Shen
Ann Arbor (Mich.)
Aztec Terrace
Aztec Villa
Beverly Hills (Calif.)
Chengdu (China)
Chongqing (China)
Correspondence
Engineers
Frontier housing
Gloucester (England)
Golden Gate Park (San Francisco, Calif.)
Imperial Valley (Calif. and Mexico)
Kao-Shang Tribe
Lake Arrowhead (Calif.)
Los Angeles (Calif.)
Mexicali (Mexico)
Nanjing (Jiangsu Sheng, China)
New York (N.Y.)
Port Hueneme (Calif.)
Riverlawn housing
Saint Louis (Mo.)
San Bernadino (Calif.)
San Diego (Calif.)
San Francisco (Calif.)
Santa Monica (Calif.)
Taipei (Taiwan)
Temporary housing
Washington (D.C.)
World War, 1939-1945

Hsiou Tseng Wang correspondence, 1946 November 14-1957 October 30 and undated

1. Letter from Wang to the Trasks, 1946 November 14
   Scope and Content
   Trasks concerned about their safety in Nanking. Fall of Manchuria to Communists, Nanking is threatened.

2. Christmas card from Wang family to Trask family, circa 1946

3. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, circa 1946
   Scope and Content
   Playing tennis with American major over there (China).

4. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, circa 1946
   Scope and Content
   Stationed in Santa Monica. Receives Life magazine and Reader's Digest subscriptions Trasks bought for them.

5. Letter from Wang to Mr. and Mrs. Trask, 1947 January 24
   Scope and Content
   Information on accident and insurance company settlement. Best wishes to “your new Willard” (newborn).
6. Letter from Wang to Mr. and Mrs. Trask, 1947 March 17
Scope and Content
Stationed in Santa Monica. Attended horse race at Santa Anita. Went to Lincoln park, alligator farm, then San Bernardino, Lake Arrowhead. Comments on listening to his new radio (paid $107).

7. Letter from Wang to “Pauline and Grover,” circa 1947
Scope and Content
Packing to leave, has been summoned to Washington. Recalls a visit to San Diego.

8. Letter from Wang to Mr. and Mrs. Trask, 1947 May
Scope and Content
Thanks Grover for the nice visit and spending time with him. Opened Savings account in the States, leaving bank book with Trasks so they can buy him things while he’s abroad.

9. Letter from Wang to the Trasks, 1948 February 29
Scope and Content
Wang’s friend Li Shen was called to Washington to receive the airships that China recently obtained from United States. Wang writes of his interest in “American dancing” and its popularity in China, as well as going to the movies.

10. Letter from Wang to the Trasks, 1948 April 20
Scope and Content
Discusses Chinese presidential election: Chiang Kai-shek elected. Describes election process in detail. Sending negatives of photos, asks to get them enlarged since there are no enlarging facilities in Nanking.

11. Letter from Wang to the Trasks, 1948 July 5
Scope and Content
Reading copies of “Life” and “Time” magazines, and comments on contents as well as his experiences back in China. Writes about the “Very-Moon (?) Festival” celebrated on the 5th day of the 5th month of the Chinese calendar year “commemorating our Ancient great poet and philosopher, Chu-Yuan since his death” -- “people celebrated double fifth by eating Tsung-tze (rice wrapped in leaves—originally to be thrown into water to feed Chu-Yuan).”

12. Letter from Wang to the Trasks, 1948 August 29-October 15
Scope and Content
Comments on Chinese government having decreed a new currency system called the ‘gold standard.’ Writes of friend of his, Lt. Col. Wang, who discovered he has cancer, and comments on cancer treatment. Purchase a fan, and bought an additional one which he writes of mailing it to the Trasks.

13. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, circa 1949
Scope and Content
Writes about Taiwan. Went to mountains to visit “real natives,” the Kao shan tribe, in Taiwan, and took a picture with the tribe’s two princesses, Princess Elizabeth (younger), and Princess Margaret (older). (Two photographs enclosed with letter.) Comments on increasing prices. Wants to withdraw money from his savings account in the U.S., will ask his friend Li Shen about it. Two photographs enclosed with letter.

14. Tracing paper with Chinese characters, circa 1949
Scope and Content
Same group of characters repeated, possibly Wang’s address.
15. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, 1949 July 31
Scope and Content
Remarks on a $10 check Mrs. Trask had sent him that he sent back. But she sent it back again and it was stolen in the mail. Asked Mrs. Trask to take money out of his U.S. account for him, and a friend will receive it from her to take to him in China. Also inquires on Mrs. Trask’s health.

16. Letter from Wang to Mr. and Mrs. Trask, circa 1950s
Scope and Content
Wang is abroad, stationed in barracks with other officers. Played bingo for the first time. Writes he is including pre-addressed envelopes for her (with address written in Chinese characters).

17. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, 1951 February 28
Scope and Content
Discusses poultry raising - they have 80 chicks. Respondes to Trasks’ letter about tea he sent and how much they liked it, he will try to send more Long Green and Jasmine tea. Impressed by how much more the Trasks read about China than he reads about U.S. Asks if Mrs. Trask has read anything by Lin YuTang. Writes about a Chinese tradition in which "the parents of the newborn baby always present their friends with Red Eggs (Eggs dyed red)."

18. Letter from Wang to the Trasks, 1953 October 26
Scope and Content
Wang has been transferred to Taipei, moving his family there too so not to be separated from wife. Purchased small house in the suburbs.

19. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, 1954 January 11
Scope and Content
Talks about Chinese phrases being used in American conversation. Three photographs enclosed in letter are not labeled. They appear to be of Wang with friends in the U.S., one of Wang with an American woman who is possibly Mrs. Trask. Three photographs enclosed with letter.

20. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, 1956 April 7
Scope and Content
Wang has been transferred to Taipei, moving his family there too so not to be separated from wife. Purchased small house in the suburbs.

21. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, 1956 October 14
Scope and Content
Received seeds (tomato and corn) for garden from Mrs. Trask in the magazines she sent them. Wan-Ming and "mosquito (little Hwang)" are in Taipei, included in briefing U.S. General. Mentions Wan-Ming's ability to speak English.

22. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, 1957 October 30
Scope and Content
Remarks on cancer and treatment. Wang put in his third request for retirement, not sure if it will be granted. Will have to look for a new job and start fresh, but will worry about that when the time comes. Mentions celebrations during October, including national holiday, return of Taiwan to China, and President's 71st birthday.
23. Letter from Wang to Mrs. Trask, circa 1950s
   Scope and Content
   Writes about Su-hua’s anticipation of receiving dress material. His brother, Hsieo-Yu
departed to United States, first stationed in Washington. Gives contact information to
Trasks in case brother’s itinerary includes San Diego. Remarks on receiving copies of
"Post."

Box-folder 1:2

Li Shen Wen correspondence, 1947 October 21–1948 January 16
1. Letter from Wen to Mrs. Trask, 1947 October 21
   Scope and Content
   Apologizes for not being in touch sooner; packing and preparing for his trip consumed all
his time. Expresses gratitude for "entertainment and gift" received from Trasks.

2. Letter from Wen to Mrs. Trask, 1948 January 16
   Scope and Content
   Continuing in the U.S., stationed in Washington. Will be in California soon for new job
assignment in Los Angeles.

Box-folder 1:3

Wan Ming Chen correspondence, 1946 March 19–1948 April 15
1. Letter from Chen to Mrs. Trask, 1946 March 19
   Scope and Content
   Returned to St. Louis after trip to nine big U.S. cities with the other men in his group.
Comments on his travels and observations, including the high demand for nylons.

2. Typed letter from Chen to Mrs. Trask, 1946 March 29
   Scope and Content
   Writing first letter to Mrs. Trask on a typewriter. Encloses money for Mrs. Trask to buy
pairs of nylons for him to give to female relatives in China.

3. Letter from Chen to Mrs. Trask, 1947 August 21
   Scope and Content
   Has been a year since he left San Diego, thinks often of Trasks and their kindness. Mailed
them Christmas cards but must have gotten lost in mail. Thanks Mrs. Trask for gifts sent
to his wife.

4. Letter from Chen to Mrs. Trask, 1947 August 28
   Scope and Content
   At military base in Sacramento. Plans to attend the California State Fair in Sacramento.

5. Letter from Chen to Mrs. Trask, 1948 April 15
   Scope and Content
   Apologizes for delay in writing. His wife was ill for a month, is now recovered. Apologizes
for messiness and informality of letter, and comments on Chinese versus U.S. letter
writing customs.

Box-folder 1:4

Po Lin Shen correspondence, 1946 January 18–1947 April 4
1. Letter from Shen to Mrs. Trask, 1946 January 18
   Scope and Content
   Traveled to Chicago, then St. Louis. Enrolled in graduate school at University of Michigan.
2. Letter from Shen to Mrs. Trask, 1946 January 31
Scope and Content
Follow-up to two air-mailed letters he sent, hasn't heard back from Mrs. Trask. Gives new address in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

3. Letter from Shen to Mrs. Trask, 1947 April 4
Scope and Content
Received nylons for his "girl" sent by Mrs. Trask, as he'd requested previously. Comments on similarity of California climate to his hometown, Amoy.

Box-folder 1:5
Cheng Li Chou correspondence, 1947 March 22–1956 December 27
1. Letter from Chou to Mrs. Trask, 1947 March 22
Scope and Content
Writing from Gloucester, England

2. Letter from Chou to Mrs. Trask, 1956 December 8
Scope and Content
Received Mrs. Trask's letter and package but hasn't opened it yet because he's waiting for his friend Col. Wang.
At Port Hueneme, California. Weather keeps changing.

3. Letter from Chou to Mrs. Trask, 1956 December 27
Scope and Content
Arrived in San Francisco, to Mare Island (naval base).
Would like to visit San Diego again but is not sure when they'll have the chance.

Box-folder 1:6
Photographs, 1945-1959
Box-folder 1:7
Cloth envelope, undated
Scope and Content
Sent by Mr. H.T. Wang from Taipeih, Taiwan to Mrs. Grover C. Trask in San Diego. Empty of contents.

Box-folder 1:8
Trask Family Memories, 1998 February 14
Includes:
Copy of “Memories – Feb. 14, 1998, Mrs. Willard W. Trask”
Copy of “Memories – Feb. 14, 1998, From Willard and Joyce Trask”