Descriptive Summary
Title: Gerald M. Best Collection
Dates: 1932-1981
Collection Number: MS 16
Creator/Collector: Best, Gerald M. (1895-1985)
Extent: 8 boxes
Repository: California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives
Sacramento, California 95814
Abstract: The correspondence, writings and research material from noted railroad historian and photographer Gerald M. Best.
Language of Material: English
Access
This collection is open for research at our off-site storage facility with one week's notice. Contact Library & Archives staff to arrange for access.
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Preferred Citation
Gerald M. Best Collection. California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives
Acquisition Information
Biography/Administrative History
Railroad historian, writer, and photographer Gerald M. Best was born in 1895 and raised in Port Jervis, New York. While pursuing a career in radio communications and in motion picture sound engineering, Best became active in model railroading and in railroad photography. Beginning in 1948, he restored his own narrow gauge Baldwin plantation locomotive "Olomana" which he operated on Ward Kimball's Grizzly Flats Railroad in Southern California. This engine is now on exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Prior to his retirement in 1962, Best wrote two books and a number of articles on railroad history. After retiring, he authored ten other books as well as several pamphlets and articles. His last article appeared posthumously in the Autumn 1985 issue of RAILROAD HISTORY. Best was active in the Pacific Coast and Southern California Chapters of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society and served as a vice-president of the national organization. He died in 1985. Bibliography: Arnold S. Menke, "Gerald M. Best's 'Autobiography of a Railfan,'" RAILROAD HISTORY (No. 158, Spring 1988), pp. 14-71.
Scope and Content of Collection
Consists of correspondence, research notes and copied materials, manuscripts of Gerald M. Best's publications, rosters, and ephemera. This collection is arranged into the following series: SERIES SUMMARY 1 CORRESPONDENCE 2 WRITINGS 3 RAILROAD RESEARCH 4 ROSTERS 5 EPHEMERA The correspondence relates largely to railroad topics, although some personal correspondence is present. Topics include his association with the Golden Spike Centennial Celebration in 1969, the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, the formation of the California State Railroad Museum, and Best's publications. There are also letters to and from other railroad historians, writers, and photographers. The research notes pertain to Best's publications, as well as to other railroad subjects which did not find their way into print. Rosters include those prepared by Best and by others. The manuscripts are typewritten carbon copies. Ephemera includes clippings, brochures, handouts, etc. Patrons are also directed to the following Gerald M. Best collections and materials which have been removed and catalogued separately: published materials, photographs and artifacts.

MS 16 Gerald M. Best Collection [Complete finding aid]