William Arthur Oden Collection

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2020
Descriptive Summary
Title: William Arthur Oden Collection
Dates: 1953-1988
Collection Number: MS 420
Extent: 1 box + 1 half-box
Repository: California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives
Sacramento, California 95814
Abstract: Contains material generated and collected by William Oden while President of Short Line Enterprises. Emphasizes consulting work for the California State Railroad Museum and for the State of Nevada. This collection is arranged into the following series: Series 1. PROJECT FILES Series 2. SHORT LINE ENTERPRISES BUSINESS RECORDS Series 3. GENERAL FILES
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
William Arthur Oden Collection. California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives
Acquisition Information
Donated in 1996 by former Short Line Enterprises partner, Jim Clark.
Biography/Administrative History
William Arthur Oden was a nineteenth-century renaissance man who loved railroading and greatly valued understanding nineteenth-century railroad construction and construction techniques. Born on August 1, 1938, he built his own live steam locomotive at an early age and operated it on the tracks of the Los Angeles Live Steamers in Griffith Park. By the mid-1970s, he was Manager of Product Development for Doughboy Recreational Pools in Los Angeles with expertise in mechanical design, engineering and product development of fluid control systems. In 1967, Bill joined with three other Southern California railroad enthusiasts - Logan Stan Garner, Ronald G. Steiner and Robert D. Verkuyl - in a partnership, which became known as Short Line Enterprises. With Bill Oden as President, Short Line accumulated three operable nineteenth-century steam locomotives and eighteen nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cars. The objective of the four principals was to collect, restore and operate primarily 19th century railroad equipment for purposes of preservation, excursions, motion pictures and other commercial uses. During 1974-1975, Bill Oden and Stephen Drew were consultants to the Nevada State Railroad Museum. During 1976, they did similar consulting reports for the California State Railroad Museum at Old Sacramento. During the summer of 1976, Short Line Enterprises - with Bill as daily locomotive engineer - provided the equipment for the Virginia & Truckee excursion railroad operating out of Virginia City, Nevada. Bill and his wife, Ronda, purchased a home in Virginia City. From late 1976 through mid 1981, Bill was supervisor of railroad engineering and restoration for the California State Railroad Museum. For four years, Bill directed the staff of some 40 artisans who were responsible for the accurate restoration of 21 locomotives and cars for CSRM's Museum of Railroad History which opened on May 2, 1981 in Old Sacramento. Beginning in mid 1981, Bill Oden assumed similar supervisory responsibilities for the Nevada State Railroad Museum at Carson City. Most of Short Line's important nineteenth-century locomotives and cars were ultimately purchased by the Nevada State Railroad Museum. Bill died of a heart attack in 1983 and is buried in the Virginia City Cemetery - within view of the operating Virginia & Truckee Railroad. At the time of his death, Bill Oden was survived by his wife, Ronda, his mother, and two daughters from a previous marriage.
Scope and Content of Collection
These documents reflect Oden's many projects, particularly his work for the California State Railroad Museum. Other projects included writing a problem statement and a master plan & restoration project for a Virginia & Truckee Railroad excursion railroad, filming of Sierra Railroad equipment, a locomotive inspection and repair report for Sierra Railroad and a concession proposal for the Sierra Railroad site in Jamestown, the organization of a Nevada Railroad Museum, and the
development of the Southern Nevada Railroad.

MS 420 William Arthur Oden Collection [Complete finding aid]