Tim McKay Collection

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Arcata, California 95521-8299
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2018
Descriptive Summary

Title: Tim McKay Collection

Dates: 1850s-2006

Collection Number: 2007.01

Creator/Collector: Tim Mckay (1947-2006)

Extent: 60 cubic feet

Repository: Humboldt State University Library
Arcata, California 95521-8299

Abstract: The Tim McKay Collection holds an excellent representation of the materials generated by environmental activists from the 1970s to 2006. McKay was employed by the Northcoast Environmental Center (NEC) in Arcata, California for 31 years, and was Executive Director for 30 of those years. In that position, Tim was at the center of a large network and information clearinghouse for issues of local, regional, state, national, and world wide concern. The collection is especially rich in information about north coast regional forest land management, ancient forests/old growth, the Klamath/Siskiyou area, the Gasquet Orleans Road (G-O Rd.), national forests, and endangered species. Other strengths include forest practices, wilderness, bioregionalism, and land use policies. The McKay Postcard Collection was donated at same time and is maintained as a separate collection, 2007.02.

Language of Material: English

Access
Open for research by appointment.

Publication Rights

Copyright has not been assigned to Humboldt State University and has been retained by Tim McKay's children, Laurel McKay and Forrest McKay, and their heirs. To obtain permission to publish or reproduce in any format please contact the Special Collections Librarian.

Preferred Citation

Tim McKay Collection. Humboldt State University Library

Acquisition Information

Gift from Laurel McKay and Forrest McKay. Additional donation by Michele Marta in 2012. CD of images taken at 2006 memorial donated by Mark Larson.

Biography/Administrative History

Susie Van Kirk graciously wrote an essay based on her long friendship with Tim McKay and the materials in this collection. It begins with this overview of Tim and his life’s work: A life-long Californian, Tim McKay—naturalist, writer, scholar, historian, environmental advocate—was executive director of the Northcoast Environmental Center (NEC) in Arcata, California from 1976 until his death in 2006. Under his leadership, the NEC became an influential organization in regional campaigns for Wilderness, ancient forests, and salmon, and locally as the umbrella for every grassroots, “friends of” group that took up the gauntlet as advocates for their home watersheds. He was a man of persistence and unswerving dedication to the ecological complexities and beauties of the natural world. McKay was gifted and had an insatiable drive for knowledge and a mind to match, allowing him to absorb, retain, and use information to successfully advocate for wild places, functioning ecosystems, and their associated fauna and flora. His ability with words, his scholarship, his passion, and an uncanny political savvy transformed a fledgling group of the early environmental movement into a force to be reckoned with, and one that has left its mark across the regional landscape. Often under personal attack, including threatening phone calls, McKay responded as a man confident in his position on the issues, always following his favorite rule-to-live-by: “Endless pressure; Endlessly applied.”

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection consists of the papers, maps, photographic images, and audio recordings that were in Tim McKay’s home at the time of his death. McKay’s citizen activism, political activities (starting with the 1968 McGovern campaign), friendships and social activities, as well as his bird watching and gardening hobbies are well represented in this collection. Every locally relevant topic is represented. Tim's extensive library and his extraordinary collection of art were not included in this donation though they are documented in the Digital Files series described below. A large postcard collection was donated at the same time and is being processed as the McKay Postcard Collection. The Tim McKay Collection holds an excellent representation of the materials generated by environmental activists from the 1970s to 2006. McKay was employed by the Northcoast Environmental Center (NEC) for 31 years, and was Executive Director for 30 of those years. In that position, Tim was at the center of a large network and information clearinghouse for issues of local, regional, state, national, and world
The Northcoast Environmental Center (NEC) is a 501 c3 non-profit organization and was established in 1971 as a collaborative project by a group of local environmental organizations inspired by Earth Day 1970. Their first major projects were the establishment of a community recycling program and publishing the ECONeWS. The NEC is an umbrella for several environmental organizations with representatives from the member organizations making up the majority of its Board of Directors. The NEC’s library held information about all environmental topics, and the ECONeWS published information about all issues with a strong emphasis on regional concerns. The NEC’s direct activism focused mostly in the management of public lands, especially the U.S. Forest Service. Tim was constantly seeking information about all topics so this collection includes something about everything that was an environmental concern from 1970-2006. It is especially rich in information about north coast regional forest land management, ancient forests/old growth, the Klamath/Siskiyou area, the Gasquet Orleans Road (G-O Rd.), national forests, and endangered species. Other strengths include forest practices, wilderness, bioregionalism, and land use policies. Issues and campaigns involving the Siskiyou Mountain Resources Council, Redwood National Park, the Western Ancient Forest Campaign, Redwood Summer and others are well represented. In July 2001 the NEC offices were lost in a fire that consumed half a city block. The records that would tell the history of the NEC were destroyed. What happened to be at activists’ homes is what remained. Since then the NEC has built up a file of its Directors’ meetings and collected back issues of its ECONeWS. Sadly, this Tim McKay Collection is now the best source of documents that describe parts of NEC’s history. Researchers will need to explore other sources and carefully review the ECONeWS, regional newspapers, organizational newsletters and other archival collections to get the more complete history. McKay’s long time interests in Humboldt County history, especially the Westhaven and Trinidad area, as well as the history of the whole region are represented in small publications, maps, ephemera, photographs, and some of his writings. Digital Files were recovered from computer disks and from Tim’s home computer. More digital files were created at the time the collection was packed up and donated, documenting Tim’s home library, art collection, political button collection, and other artifacts. All of these reflect his cultural and environmental values. The NEC started using computers for internal projects and publications as well as networking with other organizations in the early 1980s. Once researchers have reviewed the collection’s paper files they will find additional material on every issue and subject in the digital files. Detailed lists of the digital files and some sample print pages accompany the digital files. In August 2011 significant additional materials were donated. They are included with this collection because they directly concern Tim McKay. Two CDs containing images from the Tim McKay Memorial Service, NEC’s 30th anniversary celebration, and the 2005 lecture McKay delivered for the Victor Schaub Memorial Lecture on Local Politics were donated by Mark Larson (Box 42). Michele Marta donated a large (about 300 pages) sample of email she received from Tim in 2002 (Box 5). Tim McKay and Michele Marta were engaged to be married and were living together at Tim’s Westhaven home at the time of his death in 2006. In 2012, Michele donated about 25 items. Some of them are items that were special to Michele and Tim, especially two years worth of email messages. There are a few photographs of Tim as a child and a few of him in his 50s. Many of them are cards, newspaper articles, official resolutions that represent responses by the community to the news of Tim’s death. Though many of the items date from after Tim’s death they have been incorporated into the Tim McKay Collection because they pertain to his life. Printouts of email messages from Tim to Michele from 1998 to 2000 have been added to Box 5 (folder 7) where the email messages from 2002-2004 are filed. The rest of the 2012 donation has been filed in Box 53.