Charis Wilson journal, letters, and notes documenting the Whitman trip with Edward Weston

Finding aid prepared by Brooke M. Black
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Charis Wilson journal, letters, and notes documenting the Whitman trip with Edward Weston

Inclusive Dates: 1936-2009

Bulk Dates: 1941-1942

Collection Number: mssWilsonjournal

Creator OR Collector: Wilson, Charis, 1914-2009

Extent: 202 items in two boxes

Repository: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens Manuscripts Department

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Abstract: The collection contains the journal, letters, and notes documenting the Whitman trip Charis Wilson took with photographer Edward Weston.

Language of Material: The records are in English.

Access

Collection is open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, please go to following website.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Charis Wilson journal, letters, and notes documenting the Whitman trip with Edward Weston, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Acquisition Information

The collection was purchased from Rachel Harris, Charis Wilson’s daughter, by the Library Collector’s Council in January 2003. Rachel Harris later gave more material in August 2014.

Biography

Widely known as photographer Edward Weston’s model and muse, Charis Wilson (1914-2009) was also a writer. She was born in San Francisco in 1914. She met Weston in Carmel, California in 1934, and they started a romantic relationship shortly thereafter. In 1937 Weston received a Guggenheim Fellowship and he and Wilson spent the year traveling around California and the American West. While Weston made pictures, Wilson kept a detailed journal of their experiences. In 1939 they married, and, in 1940 California and the West. In 1941 Weston was asked to take photographs to illustrate a Limited Edition Club edition of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass. Weston and Wilson traveled the United States by automobile for two years to complete both the Guggenheim and the Whitman projects. They divorced in 1946 and Wilson married labor activist Noel Harris. Harris and she had two daughters before divorcing in 1967. Wilson’s memoir, Through Another Lens was published in 1999. She died in Santa Cruz, California in 2009.

Scope and Content

This small collection includes Charis Wilson’s typed journal for the eight-month trip she and Weston took during 1941 for the “Whitman” tour as well as supporting material including correspondence, the trip itinerary, notes, photographs, letters of introduction for Weston, newspaper clippings, brochures and miscellaneous ephemera, a negative list, and a list of illustrations for Leaves of Grass with Whitman quotations selected by Wilson. The journal typescript draft contains two black and white photographs.

Also included is correspondence between Weston, Wilson, George Macy, and Merle Armitage regarding the Limited Editions Club project as well as letters Weston and Wilson received during the “Whitman” trip. Among the authors of letters of introduction for Weston are photographer and curator, Beaumont Newhall, and artist Charles Sheeler.
The material was kept in the order in which it came to the Huntington Library. The original folders were also retained (if present).

The Huntington Library also has Charis Wilson’s journal (typescript) from her and Edward Weston’s Guggenheim-funded trip throughout California and the West in 1937 to 1939, which resulted in the book California and the West. Call number: HM 51997

**Personal Names**

Armitage, Merle, 1893-1975
Macy, George
Moe, Henry Allen, 1894-1975
Newhall, Beaumont, 1908-1993
Pearce, Charles A., 1906-1970
Sheeler, Charles, 1883-1965
Weston, Edward, 1886-1958
Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892. Leaves of grass
Wilson, Charis, 1914-2009

**Corporate Names**

Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery
John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation
Limited Editions Club

**Subjects**

Photographers -- United States

**Genre**

Diaries -- United States -- 20th century
Letters (correspondence) -- United States -- 20th century
Notes -- United States -- 20th century
Photographs -- United States -- 20th century
Photographs -- United States -- 21st century

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**Box 1**

**Folder 1**

**Charis Wilson’s Journal and Supporting Material**


Includes handwritten edits, notes in pencil, and sketches, presumably by the author, as well as two black and white photographs. 232 pages. 1 item. Supporting material in next six folders.

**Folder 2**


Includes travel to Arizona & New Mexico. Includes letters of introduction from Ramsen Bird, President of American Colleges Assn.; Arthur E. Hohmann, L.A. Chief of Police; Leonard Reed, General Mgr., Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce; Henry A. Moe, Guggenheim Foundation; Philip Townsend Hanna, Automobile Club of Southern California; George Macy, President, Limited Editions Club. 14 items.

**Folder 3**


Travel through New Mexico and Texas. 10 items. Includes seven photographs labeled “Renaud family photos and ...?”

**Folder 4**


Travel through Texas and Louisiana. 9 items.

**Folder 5**


Travel through Mississippi, Tennessee, Ohio. 7 items.
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<th>Description</th>
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Also includes material for unpaginated journal entries. Travel through Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Maine, Connecticut. 18 items. Includes two letters by Charis Wilson to Pete Fusco and related newspaper clipping (1978). |
Unpaginated journal entries. Travel through New York, New Jersey, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, New Mexico. 27 items. |
| 1      | Correspondence, Notes, etc.  
Correspondence between George Macy, Merle Armitage, Edward Weston, and Charis Wilson regarding Limited Editions Club project (1941, Feb. 17-1942, Mar. 18)  
Contains 90 items including drafts, carbons, and some photocopies of original letters; includes two original Edward Weston letters. 90 items. |
| 2      | Correspondence received by Edward Weston and Charis Wilson while on the road during the Whitman trip (1941-1942)  
Correspondents include Mary McMeen (housesitter; 11 letters); Bea Prendergast (6 letters); George Zilliac (1 letter); “Zim” (1 letter). 23 items. |
| 3      | Letters of Introduction (1939-1941)  
Typescript including names, addresses, and letters of introduction for the journey. Includes two letters from Beaumont and Nancy Newhall; one letter from Charles Sheeler. 49 items. |
| 4      | Charis Wilson and Wendy Madar’s notes related to the pre-Whitman trip preparations (1940-1941)  
4 items. Includes notes from 1996. |
| 5      | Reading list suggestions from Charles Pearce of Duell, Sloane, and Pearce (1941)  
5 items. |
| 6      | Leaves of Grass Negative List (1941)  
Lists 667 negatives. 2 pages contain instructions from EW to Brett - pp. 3, 21. 3 items. |
| 7      | List of illustrations for Leaves of Grass with accompanying Whitman quotations selected by Charis [1942]  
3 items. |
| 8      | Photocopy of Leaves of Grass with handwritten captions by Charis Wilson.  
Paddington Press, Ltd. (1976)  
1 item. |
| 9      | Empty folder entitled “Typd Add Lists Used ------- Unused with some letters.” Folder was empty when Library received it. |
| 10     | Correspondence between Edward Weston and George Macy (1941)  
2 items. |
| 11     | Letter by Charis Wilson to Merle Armitage (1942, Apr. 16)  
1 item. Copy. |
| 12     | Letter by George F. Vesper to Edward Weston and Charis Wilson (1947, Apr. 26)  
1 item. Copy. |
Folder 13  Letter by Herman More to Edward Weston (1936, Mar. 10)
       1 item. Copy.

Folder 14  Letter by Mrs. Charles Everett McKinley, Jr. to Charis Wilson (1941, June 27)
       2 items. With envelope and calling card. The blank sheets have Charis Wilson's name and
       address written by her.

Folder 15  Letters by Edward Weston to Henry Allen Moe (1939)
       3 items. Copies. Includes reply letter.

Folder 16  Photographs of Charis Wilson (1941-2009)
       8 items.

Folder 17  Places to See near Athens, GA: hand-drawn map [undated]
       1 item.

Folder 18  Princeton: booklets (1939-1940)
       2 items.

Folder 19  A Report on Snowflake by the United States Department of Agriculture (1936, Feb.)
       2 items. With handwritten notes and map of Region 8 (United States Southwest)