Sacramento Observer records

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Sacramento Observer records

Title: Sacramento Observer records
Identifier/Call Number: MS0011
Extent: 30 linear feet(25 boxes)
Repository: Center for Sacramento History

Abstract: The Sacramento Observer records document the production and management of the Sacramento Observer, an African American-owned weekly newspaper, between 1964 and 1988. Founded, owned, and published by William H. Lee, a business and civic leader in Sacramento, California, this collection contains Lee’s correspondence and honors, administrative and financial documents, and over 24,000 black and white photographs used in the production of the paper.

Language of Material: English
Physical location: SP: 02:G:01-05
Access
The collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Sacramento Observer records, MS0011, Center for Sacramento History

Acquisition Information

Biography/Administrative History
The Sacramento Observer is an African American-owned weekly newspaper based in Sacramento, California. The paper was established in 1962 by Dr. William H. Lee, Gino Gladden, and John W. Cole, who purchased what was then a religious weekly called the Sacramento Outlook from the Reverend J.T. Muse, with the intention of expanding the paper to serve the growing African-American community of the area. By 1965, ownership had been assumed by Lee, who went on to publish the paper with his family. In 2001, Lee appointed his wife, Kathryn, co-publisher and in 2005 executive publishing control passed from the Lees to their son Lawrence Charles Lee. The paper’s offices are located in the Oak Park neighborhood of Sacramento.

The Sacramento Observer features local, national, and international news with a focus on African-American culture, politics, and leadership. In addition to the weekly issues, the Sacramento Observer also regularly published special editions addressing Black business, Black education guides, equal opportunity guides, Martin Luther King Jr. memorials, Black entertainment guides, local church directories, and calendars of events highlighting African-American events. The Sacramento Observer spearheaded the local chapter of the National Urban League and sponsored numerous local events central to the African-American community, including the Sacramento Black Expo. The newspaper has been awarded the John B. Russwurm trophy numerous times and has received hundreds of local and national awards for outstanding community service and journalism excellence.

William Lee was born in Austin, Texas, in 1936 and moved to Sacramento with his family in 1950. His father, the Rev. Charles R. Lee, was the founder of the Unity Fellowship Baptist Church, Sacramento, and managed spiritual singing groups, one of which William Lee was a member. Lee attended Sacramento State College from 1953 to 1955, earned his AB degree from the University of California in 1957, served in the Air Force reserves from 1959 to 1965, and worked as a real estate broker before founding the newspaper. He served as a member of the board of directors of the National Newspaper Publishers Association from 1970-1973 and was president of the West Coast Black Publishers Association in 1974. He was a co-founder of the Sacramento Area Black Caucus, founder and past president of the Men’s Civic League of Sacramento, and is a lifetime member of the NAACP.

Kathryn Lee was born in 1935 in New Orleans, Louisiana, and moved to Sacramento with her family when she was 8 years old. She attended San Francisco State College and, in 1956, became the first African-American woman to work at the Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office. She worked as a legislative aide in the California State Capitol for 14 years before going to work at the Sacramento Observer. The Lees were married in 1961 and they had three sons, Roderick Joseph Lee, William H. Lee Jr., and Lawrence Charles Lee. Kathryn Lee was recognized with numerous awards including the Women’s
Civic Improvement Club’s Woman of the Year (1970); the Greyhound Corporation’s Woman of the Year (1991); the National Council of Negro Women, Sacramento Valley Section’s “Most Outstanding Women” award (1993); the Second Annual Madame Cj Walker Entrepreneurial Award (1999); and the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Sacramento Chapter’s Pioneer Award (2002). She passed away in 2013.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

This collection primarily documents the business and production activities of the *Sacramento Observer*, an African American-operated weekly newspaper, between the years of 1964 and 1988, and that of the paper’s publisher William H. Lee. Presumably collected by Lee, the materials consist of his business and research files, administrative and financial documents, and tens of thousands of black-and-white photographs used in the production of the weekly newspaper. Photographs comprise the bulk of the collection - 19 out of 25 boxes total - however they are only described here at the container level. The first six boxes have been organized and described at the folder level.

Correspondence files consist primarily of business matters and those pertaining to Lee’s extensive record of community service. This includes correspondence related to Black businesses and organizations, political correspondence, newspaper publishing associations, and national African American organizations such as the NAACP. Folders also contain extensive documentation of the production of the Afro-American Festival of 1969, of which Mr. and Mrs. Lee were organizers and sponsors. Financial records largely concern a period of financial instability for the newspaper during the 1970s. The Lees’ papers were not in a discernible order, and an artificial series hierarchy was created based on subject material under the series “William and Kathy Lee Papers.” These files are organized by correspondence, organization, and event, ending with financial and legal records regarding Roderick Lee. The *Sacramento Observer* administrative records include financial, marketing, and employee materials.

Research files were originally in alphabetical order by subject, and that order has been kept. These consist of photographs, newspaper and magazine clippings, and biographical sketches that feature African-American professionals of various fields including medicine, education, government, entertainment, business, and military. Material in the research files cover the Sacramento region, California, and national subjects and include personal photographs of the Lee family, which are filed under Rev. Charles R. Lee. The collection contains a small reference library of books, magazines, newspapers, curricular materials, and political campaign materials regarding African-American history, culture, politics, and religion.

The majority of the photographs (13 boxes) in the collection represent the Sacramento Observer production photo morgue, which are organized chronologically and foldered with the weekly issue they were used to produce. Additionally, one box of photographs is organized alphabetically by subject, while another box of photographs pertaining to sports is organized by sports team, and three boxes are not organized at all.

**Arrangement**

The collection is arranged into 5 series:


**Indexing Terms**

- African Americans
- Community Development
- Newspapers
- Sacramento (Calif.)—History
Series 1. William and Kathy Lee Papers

Physical Description: 1 box

Series Scope and Content Summary
This series is made up of personal and professional correspondence and documents from the office of William Lee. Professional correspondence is related to Lee's honors and awards, including a letter from Governor Ronald Reagan on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Sacramento Observer. Other correspondence and documents relate to Lee's involvement with the NAACP, Sacramento Black Chamber of Commerce, the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the West Coast Black Publishers Association, and the Afro American Festival (1969). Records and correspondence relating to financial issues are prevalent, including two files on financial and legal issues regarding Lee's eldest son Roderick, who served as the music editor for "The Happenings," the Sacramento Observer's entertainment guide. This series is made up of 22 folders (one oversized), or approximately 0.75 cubic feet.

Box 1:1 Address Book undated
Box 1:2 Correspondence 1969-1986
Box 1:3 Lee Honors 1972-1983
Box 1:4 Lee correspondence 1974-1989
Box 5:5 Correspondence 1970-1986
Box 5:6 Correspondence NAACP 1980-1990
Box 5:7 Correspondence - Black Chamber of Commerce 1986-1989
Box 5:8 Black Organizations 1970-1991
Box 5:9 COMO Turner/NARCEPT 1973
Box 5:10 Correspondence and Financials 1974-1983
Box 5:11 Political Correspondence - Greater Sacramento 1969-1990
Box 5:12 West Coast Black Publishers Association undated
Box 5:13 National Newspaper Publishers Association 1971-1979
Box 5:14 West Coast Black Publishers 1983
Box 5:15 National Organizations 1968, 1982
Box 5:16 Appraisal of 1800 Broadway undated
Box 5:17 Afro-American Festival 1969
Box 5:18 Afro-American Festival 1969
Box 5:19 Miss Soul “69” Contest 1969
Box 5:20 Ten Best Dressed Women 1970
Box 5:21 Roderick Lee 1974-1977
Box 5:22 Bankruptcy Court Forms undated

Series 2. Sacramento Observer

Physical Description: 5 boxes

Series Scope and Content Summary
This series contains documents, photographs, ephemera, and media pertaining to the administration of the Sacramento Observer. It is organized in five subseries, as follows, and is made up of 77 folders, 10 special edition publications, and one box containing ephemera and miscellaneous media assets.

Box 1:23 History and Background undated
Box 1:24 The Stockton Observer 1970-1981
Box 1:25 Special Issues Materials 1969-1977
Box 1:26 General Information 1969-1988

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Subseries 2.1 Administrative Files 1969-1980

Box 1:27  Advertising Materials 1961-1985
Box 1:28  Employee Info Booklet undated
Box 1:29  Form Letters undated
Box 1:30  Communications undated
Box 1:31  National Observer Staff Photos undated
Box 1:32  The “S.O.” undated
Box 1:33  San Joaquin, Stockton Materials 1990
Box 1:34  Federal Correspondence 1971, 1985
Box 1:35  Subscription Forms 1978
Box 1:36  Laugh Jam 1990

Subseries 2.2 Biographies 1967-1988

Subseries Scope and Content Summary
This subseries contains 26 folders of biographical files and photographs of politicians, entertainers, and business leaders - primarily African American - that were sent to William Lee.

Box 2:1  Biographies “A” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:2  Biographies “B” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:3  Bradley, Mayor Tom, 1983 Gubernatorial Race 1983
Box 2:4  Broussard, Allen 1981
Box 2:5  Brown, Edmund G. 1978
Box 2:6  Brown, Willie 1980-1984
Box 2:7  Burke, Yvonne 1978
Box 2:8  Biographies “C” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:9  Carter, Jimmy 1977-1980
Box 2:10  Biographies “D” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:11  Biographies “E” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:12  Biographies “F” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:13  Biographies “G” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:14  Biographies “H” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:15  Biographies “J” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:16  Biographies “K” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:17  Biographies “L” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:18  Biographies “M” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:19  Biographies “N” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:20  Biographies “O” and “P” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:21  Biographies “R” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:22  Biographies “S” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:23  Biographies “T” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:24  Biographies “U” - “W” S.B.C. undated
Box 2:25  Williams, Reverend Cecil B. 1983
Box 2:26  Biographies “X” - “Z” S.B.C. undated

Subseries 2.3 Research files 1970s-1980s

Subseries Scope and Content Summary
This subseries contains 174 folders pertaining to Black businesses, Black entertainment and culture files, and biographical sketches of individuals in medicine, education, entertainment, business, and politics that were sent to Percy Pinkney, who was at the time the Special Assistant to Governor Jerry Brown. One oversized file contains court documents regarding the case of Rahman Jabul.

Box 2:27  Advertisers 1980-1988
Box 2:28  Africa 1971-1973
Box 2:29  AKA Debutante 1988
Box 2:30  20th Anniversary Program 1982
Box 2:31 Articles, Posters, Miscellaneous 1967-1982
Box 2:32 Autos & Dealers, SAC undated
Box 2:33 Billy Graham Crusade 1983
Box 2:34 Black Art undated
Box 2:35 “Black Business Hall of Fame” Program 1981
Box 2:36 Black Enterprise Magazine 1984-1985
Box 2:37 Black History Related 1972-1979
Box 2:38 Black Pictures (not original) undated
Box 2:39 Black Political Cartoons undated
Box 2:40 Bradley, Tom 1982
Box 2:41 Brown, Jerry undated
Box 2:42 Brown, Tony 1984
Box 2:43 Speaker Brown’s Letter 1984
Box 2:44 Tony Brown’s Journal 1986
Box 2:45 Brown, Tony 1982-1986
Box 2:46 100 Most Influential Blacks undated
Box 2:47 The Africans undated
Box 2:48 Adoption undated
Box 2:49 All Cities undated
Box 2:50 C. Alfred Anderson Awards undated
Box 2:51 Black Funeral Story undated
Box 2:52 [Black Newspapers] undated
Box 2:53 Black On-Air Talent undated
Box 2:54 [Black Press Releases] undated
Box 2:55 Black Political Caucus undated
Box 2:56 Black Political Leaders, Bios and Pics undated
Box 2:57 Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. undated
Box 2:58 Church Directory undated
Box 2:59 Communications undated
Box 2:60 [Coors] undated
Box 2:61 Crocker Art Museum undated
Box 2:62 California State Colleges undated
Box 2:63 Dallas, Texas undated
Box 2:64 Denver, Colorado undated
Box 2:65 Entertainment undated
Box 2:66 Faithful Working (Mission) Club undated
Box 2:67 Fashion Show 1978
Box 2:68 Fort Ord undated
Box 2:69 NBC “Generations” 2/9/1990
Box 2:70 Hacket, Benjamin, U.S.A.A. Rear Admiral undated
Box 2:71 Haley, George Willford Boyd undated
Box 2:72 Homeless undated
Box 2:73 Houston, Texas undated
Box 2:74 Jackson, Jesse undated
Box 2:75 Jackson, Jesse, news clippings undated
Box 2:76 Jackson, Leo undated
Box 2:77 Jackson, Warren undated
Box 2:78 James, Massengale undated
Box 2:79 Jazz Jubilee undated
Box 2:80 Jean-Juste, Reverend Gerard undated
Box 2:81 Jeffries, LeRoy undated
Box 2:82 Johnson, Charles W. undated
Box 2:83 Johnson, Grantland undated
Box 2:84 Johnson, Joseph undated
Box 2:85 Johnson, Toby undated
Box 2:86 Jones, Reverend A. Paul undated
Box 2:87 Jones, David G. undated
Box 2:88 Jones, P. Orlando undated

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Box 3:53  Jordan, Barbara undated
Box 3:54  Judges undated
Box 3:55  “J” - Miscellaneous undated
Box 3:56  King, Jr., Martin Luther undated
Box 3:57  LaMotte, Jean undated
Box 3:58  Lane, Ella & Associates undated
Box 3:59  Lara, Edison (Ed) undated
Box 3:60  Lee, Charles R. Rev. (photos) undated
Box 3:61  Lee, William (resumes) undated
Box 3:62  Lewis, Joanne undated
Box 3:63  Los Rios Community undated
Box 3:64  “L” - Miscellaneous undated
Box 3:65  Manley, Michael undated
Box 4:1  Manufacturing undated
Box 4:2  Marks, Milton undated
Box 4:3  Marks, Margaret “Maggie” undated
Box 4:4  McClasky, Amie undated
Box 4:5  McCloskey, Pete undated
Box 4:6  McCauley, Harriette undated
Box 4:7  McGovern, George undated
Box 4:8  McNeil, Hayward undated
Box 4:9  Meeks, Larry undated
Box 4:10  Military undated
Box 4:11  Miller, John undated
Box 4:12  Milner, Thurman undated
Box 4:13  Minority Business undated
Box 4:14  Minneapolis undated
Box 4:15  Mitchell, Parren undated
Box 4:16  Mondale, Walter undated
Box 4:17  Meeks, Larry undated
Box 4:18  Moore, Gwen undated
Box 4:19  Moton, George undated
Box 4:20  “M” - Miscellaneous undated
Box 4:21  Nance, Don H. undated
Box 4:22  Newport, Gus undated
Box 4:23  Newton, Huey undated
Box 4:24  Noonan, Allan undated
Box 4:25  Norris, Trusse undated
Box 4:26  North Highlands undated
Box 4:27  Norton, Eleanor Holmes undated
Box 4:28  Norwood, Walter R. undated
Box 4:29  Nunn, Daniel undated
Box 4:30  City of Oakland undated
Box 4:31  Obledo, Mario undated
Box 4:32  Osborne, Len undated
Box 4:33  Oshin, William undated
Box 4:34  Owens, Major undated
Box 4:35  Pannell, Sam undated
Box 4:36  Parr, Ray undated
Box 4:37  Patterson, Clarence J. “C.J.” undated
Box 4:38  Patterson, Lucy undated
Box 4:39  Payne, Ethel undated
Box 4:40  Payton, M.D., Sarah undated
Box 4:41  Peterson, Del Roy undated
Box 4:42  Pierce, Jr., Samuel -HUD Secretary undated
Box 4:43  Pinkney, Percy undated
Box 4:44  Portland, Oregon undated
Box 4:45  “P” - Miscellaneous undated
Box 4:46 Queen Ida undated
Box 4:47 Ramey, Felicenne H. undated
Box 4:48 Rangel, Charles B. - Congressman undated
Box 4:49 Ray, Vance undated
Box 4:50 Reagan, Ronald - Governor undated
Box 4:51 Relles, Ross N. undated
Box 4:52 Riggins, Lester undated
Box 4:53 Riles, Jr., Wilson undated
Box 4:54 Real Estate undated
Box 4:55 Roberts, George undated
Box 4:56 Robie, Lynn - Sacramento City Councilman undated
Box 4:57 Rodeo undated
Box 4:58 Rowe, Donald R. undated
Box 4:59 Rudin, Anne - Mayor of Sacramento undated
Box 4:60 Russell, Ida undated
Box 4:61 “R” - Miscellaneous undated
Box 4:62 Saar, Betye undated
Box 4:63 Sacramento Area Businesses and Personalities undated
Box 4:64 San Jose, California undated
Box 4:65 Sanders, Teola undated
Box 4:66 Sanford, Isabel undated
Box 4:67 Scott, Annie undated
Box 4:68 Scott, Frank undated
Box 4:69 Serna, Joe - Mayor of Sacramento undated
Box 4:70 Sheedy, Ted - Sacramento County Supervisor undated
Box 4:71 Shell, Ernest undated
Box 4:72 Shelton, Phrasel L. - Judge undated
Box 4:73 Shepard, Huey P. - Judge undated
Box 4:74 Shindana Toys undated
Box 4:75 Sifford, Charlie - Assemblyman undated
Box 4:76 Simon, Leonard undated
Box 4:77 Smith, Jr., Archie M. - Reverend Dr. undated
Box 4:78 Smith, Dwan undated
Box 4:79 Smith, Joshua L. undated
Box 4:80 Smith, J.R. undated
Box 4:81 Smith, Myrene R. undated
Box 4:82 Smith, Willard B. undated
Box 4:83 Speraw, Ollie - Senator undated
Box 4:84 Stewart, George undated
Box 4:85 Stokes, Louis - Congressman undated
Box 4:86 “S” - Miscellaneous undated
Box 4:87 Terry, Ruth Ann undated
Box 4:88 Thomas, Debi - Ice Skating undated
Box 4:89 Thompson, Daniel E. - Councilman undated
Box 4:90 Thompson, Jerri undated
Box 4:91 Towns, Edolphus “Ed” undated
Box 4:92 Transportation undated
Box 4:93 Travis, Benjamin - Judge undated
Box 4:94 Tucker, Curtis R. - Assemblyman undated
Box 4:95 Tucker, Marcus O.- Judge undated
Box 4:96 Turner, James Edward undated
Box 4:97 Tutu, Desmond - Bishop undated
Box 4:98 Tyler, Jr., Sherman L. undated
Box 4:99 “T” - Miscellaneous undated
Box 4:100 Waters, Maxine - Assemblywoman undated
Subseries 2.4 Special editions 1970-1990

Subseries Scope and Content Summary

Box 4:101 Christmas 1970
Box 4:102 Equal Opportunity 1979
Box 4:103 Reno Observer 1979
Box 4:104 School and Career Guide 1980
Box 4:105 Martin Luther King Jr. Special 1984
Box 4:106 Black Business 1985
Box 4:107 Entertainment 1985, 1990
Box 4:108 Black Business 1989
Box 4:109 Black Business 1989
Box 4:110 Martin Luther King Jr. Special 1990

Subseries 2.5. Ephemera and media 1972-2009

Subseries Scope and Content Summary
This subseries contains five folders and ephemera (six assets) from the Sacramento Observer offices, including Observer press passes, letterhead, tear sheets, notepads, envelopes, tickets to the Sacramento Observer’s Tenth Anniversary Testimonial and Benefit Dinner (1972), staff ID cards, a stone pen holder belonging to Dr. William Lee, a political button, Sacramento Observer binder and calendar holder, and newspaper carrier signage. Media includes loose/unlabeled photographic negatives and slides, a bag containing 25 partial rolls of film (labeled, possibly undeveloped), two 7” vinyl records, and four boxes of 8” IBM floppy diskettes (labeled). This subseries also contains two binders containing a handwritten inventory of the collection created by Lilburn H. Horton Jr., the donor of the collection.

Box 5:1 Negatives undated
Box 5:2 Slides undated
Box 5:3 Miscellaneous 1972-1978
Box 5:4 Seller’s Inventory 2009
Box 5:5 Seller’s Binder undated
Box 5:5 Four Boxes, 7” IBM floppy diskettes undated
Box 5:5 Bag containing 25 partial rolls of film undated
Box 5:5 Stone pen holder undated
Box 5:5 Button undated
Box 5:5 Sacramento Observer binder undated
Box 5:5 Sacramento Observer leather calendar holder undated


Physical Description: 1 box

Series Scope and Content Summary
This series consists of publications regarding Black history, culture, business, and politics, as well as educational resources on African-American and African culture. It includes issues of The Black Scholar, Lincoln Review, Crisis, Negro History Bulletin, Tony Brown’s Journal, and National Black Monitor. Educational resources include study guides, The Black Collegian, and guides to Black public colleges; business publications like Black business guides, the Las Vegas Black Directory, the Greater Los Angeles Black Book, Spectrum: National Association of Black Accountants, the Bay Area Black Pages, California Black Business Directory, Black Enterprise magazine, Black Business News, and multiple Sacramento-specific publications; and catalogs from Black conferences and meetings, primarily held in the Sacramento area, and Sacramento black church publications.
Box 6:1  
**Africa 1969-1973**

Box 6:2  
**Black business 1973-1989**

Box 6:3  
**Black charities 1975**

Box 6:5  
**Black churches, SAC undated**

Box 6:6  
**Black Conferences/Meetings 1969-1971**

Box 6:7  
**Black Culture 1971-1983**

Box 6:8  
**Black Europe 1972**

Box 6:9  
**Black History 1968-1971**

Box 6:10  
**Black History Calendars 1971-1984**

Box 6:11  
**Black Literature n.d.**

Box 6:12  
**Black Men 1985-1988**

Box 6:13  
**Black Muslims n.d.**

Box 6:14  
**Black History Calendars 1971-1984**

Box 6:15  
**Black Publications 1971-1982**

Box 6:16  
**Black Publishers 1969-1984**

Box 6:17  
**Black Statistics 1980-1983**

Box 6:18  
**Black Women 1971-1984**

Box 6:19  
**Civil Rights 1968-1987**

Box 6:20  
**Higher Education 1969-1971**

Box 6:21  
**Miscellaneous 1969-1989**

Box 6:22  
**Negro History Bulletin 1967-1973**

Box 6:23  
**Nigeria 1970**

**Series 4. Sacramento Observer production photo morgue 1969-1971**

Physical Description: 14 boxes

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series comprises original black and white photographs from each weekly issue of the Sacramento Observer spanning July 23, 1964, to August 25, 1988. Photographs are organized in folders chronologically by issue, and in most cases, are accompanied by a copy of the published edition of the paper. Additionally, there are folders containing production prints from “The Happenings,” the Sacramento Observer’s entertainment issue.
Box 14


Box 15


Box 16


Box 17


Box 18


Box 19


Box 20


**Series 5. Sacramento Observer photographs**

Physical Description: 5 boxes

Box 21

- Subseries 5.1 Alphabetical undated

Box 22

- Subseries 5.2 Sports 1969-1977

Box 23-25

- Subseries 5.3 Unsorted photographs undated