Omar Suttles papers, 1927-1981

Finding aid prepared by Annie Tang, February 2014; machine-readable finding aid created by Caroline Cubé.
UCLA Library Special Collections
Room A1713, Charles E. Young Research Library
Box 951575
Los Angeles, CA, 90095-1575
(310) 825-4988
spec-coll@library.ucla.edu
Finding aid last modified on 2 May 2016.
Omar Suttles papers, 1927-1981

Title: Omar Suttles papers
Collection number: 1292
Contributing Institution: UCLA Library Special Collections
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 3.2 linear ft.(8 boxes)
Date (bulk): Bulk, 1950-1979
Date (inclusive): 1927-1981
Abstract: Omar Suttles (1893-1980) was the founder of the Airfloat Coach Manufacturing Company and manufactured one of the earliest travel trailers built specifically for recreation. He co-founded the Trailer Coach Association (TCA), presently known as Manufactured Housing Institute, and wrote a long-running column for Trailer Life magazine. The collection consists primarily of Suttles' scrapbooks, photographs, reminiscences, correspondence, memorabilia, brochures, and other printed materials, ranging from approximately 1927 to 1981, with Suttles posthumously receiving correspondence and honorary mentions in serials.

Language of Materials: Materials are in English.
Physical Location: Stored off-site at SRLF. Advance notice is required for access to the collection. Please contact the UCLA Library Special Collections Reference Desk for paging information.

Restrictions on Access
COLLECTION STORED OFF-SITE AT SRLF: Open for research. Advance notice required for access. Contact the UCLA Library Special Collections Reference Desk for paging information.

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction
Property rights to the physical object belong to the UCLA Library Special Collections. Literary rights, including copyright, are retained by the creators and their heirs. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine who holds the copyright and pursue the copyright owner or his or her heir for permission to publish where The UC Regents do not hold the copyright.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Omar Suttles papers (Collection 1292). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.

Processing Information
Processed by Annie Tang in 2014 in the Center for Primary Research and Training (CFPRT) with assistance from Jasmine Jones. This collection was initially processed at collection level to facilitate access and has now been processed at folder level.

Biography/History
Omar Suttles (1893-1980) was the founder of Airfloat, a Southern California trailer manufacturer. Born in 1893 in Arkansas, Suttles eventually moved to San Diego, where he not only worked for the Chrysler car company, but also had a short career as an automobile racer.

In 1927, Suttles moved to Los Angeles, where he met his wife, Ruth. They married in 1928. At this time, Suttles started his Chrysler repair shop business, where he would eventually manufacture one of the earliest travel trailers built specifically for recreation. By 1931, he had established the Airfloat Coach Manufacturing Company. His wife became an integral part of the firm's operations, particularly with regard to the trailers' interior design.

In 1936, Suttles became a founding member of the Trailer Manufacturers Association, later known as the Trailer Coach Association (TCA). The TCA, in 1975, merged with other similar organizations to form what is today called the Manufactured Housing Institute. In addition to being a membership-based organization, the TCA also published Trailer Life magazine, previously known as Western Trailer Life. Suttles wrote a running column in the 1970s, detailing the early years of trailer travel and the trailer manufacturing industry.

Airfloat contributed to the military effort of World War II, as the U.S. federal government commissioned thousands of trailers for its armed forces. The company hit its peak in the post-war period and contributed to the popularity of American cross-country tourism from the late 1940s to the 1950s. In 1955, the firm celebrated its 25th anniversary. During Suttles' 26-year ownership of the Airfloat company, he was able to patent several trailer design features.

By 1956, Suttles and his wife sold the business, acquired their own Airfloat trailer, and, in their retirement, reveled in the recreation past Airfloat customers had enjoyed for decades.

When Omar Suttles passed away in 1980, his wife Ruth donated his papers to UCLA shortly after in 1981.

Scope and Content
The collection consists primarily of Suttles’ scrapbooks, photographs, reminiscences, correspondence, memorabilia, brochures, and other printed materials, ranging from approximately 1927 to 1981, with Suttles posthumously receiving correspondence and honorary mentions in serials. The bulk of the content originates mostly from the period of the 1950s to 1970s, reflecting the later years of the Suttles’ ownership of the Airfloat firm and their travel lifestyle. The bulk of the material relates to travel.

**Organization and Arrangement**

This collection has been arranged in the following series:

- **Series 1: History of Airfloat, circa 1927-1981**
- **Series 2: Travel, 1936-1981**

Except for Series 1: History of Airfloat, no consistent original order exists. The Suttles’ categorical notes and labels within the collection influenced the arrangement and description.

**UCLA Catalog Record ID**

UCLA Catalog Record ID: 4233842

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Suttles, Omar, 1893-1980--Archives.
Inventors--United States--Archives.
Airstream trailers.
photographs.

**Series 1: History of Airfloat. circa 1927-1981.**

**Scope and Content**

This series includes scrapbooks, photographs, images, circulars, clippings of columns written by Suttles, and reminiscences about events personally written or typed by Omar and Ruth Suttles. The Suttles also included printed materials such as news clippings on the broader automotive industry.

**Organization and Arrangement**

Series 1 maintains an original order, as the papers here resemble the categorization the couple had organized in labeled folders, binders, and scrapbooks.

- **Box 1**
- **Box 7**
- **Box 2, Folder 1**
  - Reminiscences and Photos. circa 1927-1950s.
- **Box 2, Folder 2**
- **Box 2, Folder 3**
  - Popular Culture References. circa 1957.
- **Box 2, Folder 4**
  - Serial Clippings and Circulars. 1950s-1970s.
- **Box 2, Folders 5-6**

**Series 2: Travel. 1936-1981.**

**Scope and Content**

Series 2 is comprised of items related to the travel undertaken during the Suttles’ retirement: journal entries, event memorabilia, correspondence, and magazines and serial clippings, and material related to their involvement in the Trailer Coach Association (TCA). Additionally, this series includes maps, brochures, trip ideas, clippings, and automotive catalogs related to their cross-country travels and life in Hemet, California.

**Organization and Arrangement**

This series was organized topically in categories related to the Suttles’ organizational involvement in the TCA and personal travel. Within those categories, the folders were organized alphabetically.

- **Box 4, Folder 1**
- **Box 6**
- **Box 3, Folder 2**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box and Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folders 3-5</td>
<td>Trailer Life Magazines. 1936-1958.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 4, Folders 2-5</td>
<td>Arizona. circa 1969-1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 4, Folders 6-7</td>
<td>California (1 of 2). circa 1940s-1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 1</td>
<td>California (2 of 2). circa 1940s-1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folders 2-3</td>
<td>Colorado. circa 1960s-1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 8, Folder 2</td>
<td>Eastern United States. circa 1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 6</td>
<td>Hemet, California. 1936-1980.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 8, Folder 4</td>
<td>International. after 1960.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 8, Folder 5</td>
<td>Motor Homes and Other Vehicles. circa 1960s-1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5, Folder 4</td>
<td>Oregon. 1968-1972.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 8, Folder 3</td>
<td>Western United States. circa 1960s-1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 8, Folder 1</td>
<td>Wyoming. 1974.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>