Descriptive Summary

Title: Harry W. Lawton collection on Willie Boy
Date: 1889-1996, undated.
Collection Number: MS 152
Creator: Lawton, Harry W., 1927-2005
Extent: 12.81 Linear Feet (15 boxes, 1 flat file folder)
Repository: Rivera Library. Special Collections Department.
Riverside, CA 92517-5900

Abstract: This collection is comprised of correspondence, photographs, research notes, newspaper clippings, and other materials related to the Willie Boy manhunt of 1909. Topics include the Willie Boy manhunt, Harry W. Lawton's book, Willie Boy: A Desert Manhunt, the motion picture, Tell Them Willie Boy Was Here, and the legal case concerning the book, The Hunt for Willie Boy: Indian-Hating and Popular Culture. The collection includes four artifacts from the Willie Boy manhunt, which include three tin cups and a horse stirrup, Sheriff Frank Wilson's original report on the manhunt, a bone fragment from Willie Boy, scrapbooks, typescripts, screenplays, and posters.

Languages: The collection is in English.

Access

This collection is unprocessed. Please contact Special Collections & University Archives regarding the availability of materials for research use.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

[identification of item], [date if possible]. Harry W. Lawton collection on Willie Boy (MS 152). Special Collections & University Archives, University of California, Riverside.

Acquisition Information

The Harry W. Lawton collection on Willie Boy was acquired as a gift in 2002.

Historical Note

Harry W. Lawton was born in Long Beach, CA on December 11, 1927. He was a writer, journalist, editor, historian, and a lecturer at the University of California, Riverside. He is best known for his book, Willie Boy: A Desert Manhunt and for contributing to the preservation of California history. He was a founder of the California Museum of Photography, The Malki Museum, and the Malki Press. He was also the founder of UCR’s Creative Writing Program and of the University of California’s Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology. He died in Dana Point, CA on November 20, 2005.

Lawton's book, Willie Boy: A Desert Manhunt was inspired by a true story. Willie Boy was from the Chemshuevi tribe and lived on the Twentynine Palms reservation when he and Carlota, who was also from the Chemshuevi tribe, left the reservation with the intention of eloping. However, Carlota’s father, William Mike Boniface, found them and brought them back to the reservation before they could elope. After banning them from seeing each other, Boniface was discovered dead.

When Willie Boy was blamed for murdering Mike, he and Carlota escaped to the desert. A posse was sent after them, but they only returned with Carlota’s dead body. Willie Boy was also blamed for this death, and a second posse was sent after him. However, the second posse had to return after being fired upon. A third posse was sent out, and the ten day chase over more than five hundred miles ended when the third posse found a dead body that the posse named as Willie Boy's.

Willie Boy: A Desert Manhunt was published in 1960. That same year, it was awarded the James D. Phelan Award in Literature, and Desert Magazine awarded the book with the Southwest Literature Award. The book then became inspiration for the motion picture, Tell Them Willie Boy Was Here. It was released in 1969. Abraham Polonsky directed the motion picture, and Robert Redford, Katharine Ross, and Robert Blake starred in it.

In 1994, The Hunt for Willie Boy: Indian-Hating and Popular Culture was published. The book refers to Willie Boy: A Desert Manhunt and Lawton, which fueled Lawton to sue for $25,000 in damages. The 1995 legal case was settled with an agreement that inserts clarifying the references to Lawton’s book and Lawton himself would be placed in any undistributed and future copies of The Hunt for Willie Boy: Indian-Hating and Popular Culture.
**Collection Scope and Contents**

This collection is comprised of correspondence, photographs, research notes, newspaper clippings, and other material related to the Willie Boy manhunt of 1909. Topics include the Willie Boy manhunt, Harry W. Lawton’s book, *Willie Boy: A Desert Manhunt*, the motion picture, *Tell Them Willie Boy Was Here*, and the legal case concerning the book, *The Hunt for Willie Boy: Indian-Hating and Popular Culture*. The collection includes four artifacts from the Willie Boy manhunt, which include three tin cups and a horse stirrup, Sheriff Frank Wilson’s original report on the manhunt, a bone fragment from Willie Boy, scrapbooks, typescripts, screenplays, and posters.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog.

**Subjects**

Authors
California

**Genres and Forms of Materials**

Articles
Books
Correspondence
Documents
Exhibit scripts
Financial records
Galley proofs
Magazines (periodicals)
Motion pictures (visual work)
Newspapers
Photocopies
Photographs
Posters
Research notes
Scrapbooks
Typescripts