Guide to the Alfred W. Robertson Papers

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Guide to the Alfred W. Robertson Papers, ca. 1906-1979 [bulk dates 1934-1959]

Collection number: Mss 106

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Alfred W. Robertson Papers
Dates: ca. 1906-1979
Bulk Dates: 1934-1959
Collection Number: Mss 106
Creator: Robertson, Alfred W.
Extent: 1.3 linear feet (1 document box, 3 oversize boxes, and 3 sound recordings)
Repository: University of California, Santa Barbara. Library. Department of Special Collections
Santa Barbara, California 93106-9010
Abstract: Biographical files, correspondence, documents, clippings, photographs, scrapbooks, and sound recordings of a leading California State Assembly member from Santa Barbara, responsible for introducing and leading support of a bill to authorize transfer of Santa Barbara State College to the University of California system. Robertson Gym is named after him. He also authored a bill limiting development of coastal oil drilling, and led a movement to reform the California state constitution.
Physical Location: Box 1 (Del Sur); Boxes 2-4 (Del Sur Oversize); Sound Recordings (Annex 2).
Language: English.
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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information


Biography

Alfred Worcester Robertson was born in Gilmanton, New Hampshire on June 29, 1889. His father, Samuel W. Robertson (1850-1938), was an elementary school teacher who became a much-loved figure at the Santa Barbara High School after moving his family to California in 1908. At that time, Alfred, who was throughout his life known as either "Bobby" or "Robbie," had completed his freshman year at Dartmouth and transferred to Occidental College in Los Angeles so he could join his family on their move west. He was very active in collegiate sports, participating in football, basketball, baseball, and track. He also appeared in several school plays, and entered a number of oratorical contests. He went on to attend Stanford University, received his Juris Doctor degree, and was admitted to the California bar in 1913. He established a law practice in Santa Barbara, where he would live for the rest of his life. He also married his "college sweetheart," Edith Ireland, and their son Richard was born in 1918.

Alfred W. Robertson was first elected to the California State Assembly in 1934, and from the beginning of his political career, he sought to see the college in Santa Barbara become part of the University of California system. He took the first step toward this goal in 1935, when he succeeded in passing an act that changed the school from a Teachers' College to a State College. He continued to work toward this aim for many years, facing resistance from the UC Regents, who were opposed to adding schools from the state college system into their network. However, Robertson quickly increased his power and influence, rising to be the State Chairman of the Democratic Party during World War II. He enjoyed bipartisan popularity and was elected to six additional terms to the state legislature, sometimes running without Republican opposition. Finally, in October 1943, the UC Regents accepted his proposal, and the school became known as UCSBC - the University of California Santa Barbara College.

Also in 1943, Robertson met Marilyn Cooper (1903-1990), a journalist and professional singer. They were married in 1948, following Robertson's divorce from his first wife. Sadly, Robertson suffered a massive heart attack in 1950, and would be in poor health until his death on January 19, 1958. Marilyn Robertson championed her husband's memory and lobbied for a fitting memorial on the campus that he helped create. On September 18, 1959, the Alfred W. Robertson Memorial Gymnasium was dedicated at UCSB.

Scope and Content of Collection

Papers of Alfred W. Robertson, a leading member of the California State Assembly from Santa Barbara, who served from 1934-1948. Robertson was responsible for introducing and leading support of a bill to authorize transfer of Santa Barbara State College to the University of California system. He also authored a bill limiting development of coastal oil drilling, and led a movement to reform the California state constitution. The collection contains biographical files, correspondence, documents, clippings, photographs, scrapbooks, and sound recordings, mainly relating to Robertson's legislative career and the posthumous naming of UCSB's Robertson Gym in honor of his efforts on behalf of the university.

Abbreviations: AWR = Alfred W. Robertson

Indexing Terms

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

Education, Higher.
Education -- California -- History.
California -- Politics and government.
Santa Barbara (Calif.) -- History, Local.
Robertson, Alfred W.
University of California, Santa Barbara.

Box 1: 1
Assembly Career (California State Assembly) - mainly copies of legislative bills, clippings, and correspondence, with annotations by Marilyn Robertson, ca. 1935-1958

Box 1: 2
Biographical File - includes early Occidental College material, correspondence, clippings, and research files of Willie Wilton, along with draft biography by Marilyn Robertson, ca. 1911-1972
Box 1: 3  Clippings, ca. 1937-1968
Box 1: 4  Constitution of California revision, 1947
Box 1: 5  Correspondence - includes letters from several California officials, such as Governor Earl Warren, 1950-1955
Box 1: 6-7  Death - obituaries, condolences, memorial book, 1958
Box 1: 8  Oil Bill, 1938, 1954
Box 1: 9  Photographs - mainly b/w publicity shots of Robertson and other dignitaries, ca. 1947-1959
Box 1: 10  Robertson Gym - correspondence, press releases, articles, and programs, 1959
Box 1: 11  Sproul, Robert G. - 25th Anniversary Event Honoring Sproul, President of the UC Board of Regents, with transcripts of speeches by Sproul and Edwin Pauley, 1956
Box 1: 12  Storke, Thomas M. (highlighting the differences of opinion re Robertson's and Storke's roles in making Santa Barbara State College part of the UC system) - copies of clippings, memorial, and other material, annotate by Marilyn Robertson, ca. 1944-1966
Box 1: 13  University of California (transfer of Santa Barbara State College) - including copy of 1943 bill, as well as other correspondence, clippings, and documents, ca. 1943-1958
Marilyn C. Robertson
Box 1: 14  Correspondence and other material about her activities and her husband's career, 1940-1979
Samuel W. Robertson (AWR's father)
Box 1: 15  Correspondence, 1918, 1954
Oversize
Box 2: 1  Document admitting AWR to practice law in the state of California, 1913
Scrapbooks - mainly clippings of legislative issues, including constitutional revision, UC, Thomas M. Storke on UC Board of Regents; some correspondence, photographs, and election items; also includes some loose items
Box 2: 2  1906-1910 (high school and college years)
Box 3: 1  ca. 1934-1944
Box 4: 1-3  ca. 1947-1957
Sound Recordings
Tape No. A6620  78rpm - 25th anniversary honoring Robert Sproul, with Ed Pauley and Robertson remarks, May 2, 1956
Tape No. A6621  Open Reel - 25th anniversary, May 2, 1956
Tape No. A6622  Cassette - Dedication of Alfred W. Robertson Memorial Gymnasium, Sept. 18, 1959