Preliminary Guide to the William Wyles Papers

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Preliminary Guide to the William Wyles Papers, ca. 1880s-1980

Collection number: Wyles Mss 31

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Processed by:
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Date Completed:
25 September 2003
Encoded by:
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Descriptive Summary

Title: William Wyles Papers,
Date (inclusive): ca. 1880s-1980
Collection Number: Wyles Mss 31
Extent: .6 linear feet (1 document box and 1 oversize box)
Repository: University of California, Santa Barbara. Library, Department of Special Collections
Santa Barbara, California 93106-9010
Physical Location: Del Sur
Language: English.

Access Restrictions
None.

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Preferred Citation
William Wyles Papers. Wyles Mss 31. Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Acquisition Information
Multiple gifts and accretions, ca. 1930s-1980.

Biography
The William Wyles Collection in the Department of Special Collections, UCSB Libraries, is named after William Wyles, a successful businessman and avid collector. Wyles was born in 1857 in New York State, and moved with his parents to Michigan when he was six months old. He grew up in a log cabin which, in part, spurred his interest in Abraham Lincoln, who had been raised in similar circumstances. He vaguely recalled the Civil War, in which four of his uncles had fought. His father, Bunner Wyles, was an Eastern college professor, who died when Wyles still was a small boy.
As a youth, Wyles acquired first-hand knowledge of the West, working as a cowboy. Later on, he went to China and was involved in overseas trade. These experiences further influenced his interests and the collection he would build. He went on to become a successful hotelman in Chicago but ill health caused him to take a respite from this and he moved to Santa Barbara in 1887.

In the 1890s Wyles married Frances (Fannie) Harrington of Chicago, who was the daughter of the Paris editor of the Chicago Tribune. She died in 1938 and Wyles made a substantial donation in her name to the Santa Barbara Educational Loan Fund, to underwrite loans to needy Santa Barbara State College students. William and Fannie Wyles had no children.

In Santa Barbara, Wyles took over management of the San Marcos Hotel. He bought a ranch in Carpinteria, where he grew walnuts and beans in an age before lemons were well-known in the area. In 1904 he built what is said to be the first apartment house in Los Angeles, which he retained for many years, until 1943.

In 1928 Wyles began collecting books as a hobby. He was an energetic and tenacious collector, the result being that the collection soon outgrew his capacity to store it. He worked out an arrangement with Clarence Phelps, then President of Santa Barbara College, whereby the college would provide a room for the collection, would catalog it, and make it available to students. For his part, Wyles would continue to purchase materials to add to the collection.

Upon his death in 1946, Wyles left his estate in trust as an endowment for the collection, to guarantee its future growth. It is largely due to this endowment that UCSB continues to be able to develop the collection. Today, the Wyles Collection contains nearly 40,000 volumes and several hundred manuscript collections. It is the largest collection on the West Coast devoted exclusively to Lincoln, the American Civil War and its origins, and American westward expansion.

*Much of the information about William Wyles is drawn from Jay Monaghan's publications and Santa Barbara News Press articles and Wyles 1946 obituary.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection contains biographical information, correspondence, ephemera, legal documents, photographs, and other materials relating to William Wyles, as well as board records, correspondence, purchase information, scrapbook, and descriptions of the early development of the Wyles Collection (known in former years as the Lincoln Library), located in the Department of Special Collections, UCSB Libraries.

See also:


### Series 1. Wyles, William

#### Box 1: 1

**Biographical Information, ca. 1944 - 1946**

**Ephemera from 1845 Wyles Family Bible, 1845**

Abstract: [Cataloged separately: Wyles DS185 1845 H33 - family record on pp. 2-3]

#### Box 1: 2

**Legal Documents, 1917**

Abstract: [Land Transactions]

#### Box 1: 3

**Letters from School Children, 1929**

**Membership Certificates, ca. 1909 - 1941**

Abstract: [In various organizations such as the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship]

#### Box 1: 4

**Photographs, ca. 1880s-1930s**

Abstract: [Incl. portrait and places where Wyles lived]

#### Box 1: 5

**Santa Barbara Education Loan Fund, 1940**

Series 2. Wyles Collection

#### Box 1: 6

**Board, ca. 1947 - 1956**

**Correspondence, ca. 1931 - 1945**
Box 1: 10  **Ephemera, n.d.**
Abstract: [Two Lincoln-related medallions]

Box 1: 11  **Leads, n.d.**
Box 1: 12  **Purchases, ca. 1938 - 1945**
Box 1: 13  **Trust Agreement and Amendments, ca. 1945 - 1946**
Box 1: 14  "William Wyles and the Wyles Collection," Jay Monaghan, 1957
Box 1: 15  "William Wyles Collection," Jay Monaghan, 1980

Series 3. **Oversize Items**

Box 2: 1  **Portraits - William Wyles, n.d.**
Abstract: [2 items]

Box 2: 2  **Scrapbook - "William Wyles and the Lincoln Library", 1929 - 1954**
Abstract: [Newspaper clippings]