Yosemite Museum Program Records

Finding aid created by Yosemite National Park Archives staff using RecordEXPRESS
Yosemite National Park Archives
5083 Foresta Road
El Portal, California 95318
(209)379-1282
Paul_Rogers@nps.gov
http://www.nps.gov/yose/historyculture/collections.htm
2017
Descriptive Summary

Title: Yosemite Museum Program Records

Dates: 1900-2011

Collection Number: YCN: 1026 (YOSE 237704)

Creator/Collector:

Extent: 52 LF (98 manuscript boxes, 5 boxes of audio cassettes, 2 boxes of backup CDs, 2 oversize boxes, 2197 photographic prints, 109 slides, 15 negatives, 72 maps, plans and drawings)

Online items available:

Repository: Yosemite National Park Archives

El Portal, California 95318

Abstract: This body of records represents the activities of the Museum Program's leadership and support staff, operating as a branch of the Interpretation and Education Division. Although a few documents date to the park’s earliest years, most records range in date from approximately 1971 to 2005, while the program was largely under the leadership of Jack Gyer and later, Chief Curator Dave Forgang. Records reflect the planning, operations, and special projects of the program chief, curator, registrar, archivist, librarian, historian, ethnographer, and museum technician. Of note is the presence of records documenting park activities before the creation of other divisions addressing issues regarding historic preservation, cultural resource studies, and Native American consultation. Since the museum program was directed by the chief park naturalist until the 1980s, relevant documents may also be found in the correspondence and subject files of the Interpretation and Education Division. Documentation of activities involving exhibits created by Chief Park Naturalist Douglass Hubbard including the Visitor Center, El Portal Transportation Exhibit, and the Pioneer Yosemite History Center are also included with Interpretation and Education Division Records. Document types include correspondence, annual reports, project reports, agreements, budgets, completed historic resources forms, publications, audio files, and photographic prints, slides, and negatives. Oversized maps, plans, drawings, and charts are also included.

Language of Material: English

Access

While this collection is open to the public, sensitive and restricted materials have been flagged and require appropriate permission through the Yosemite Archivist to access.

Preferred Citation

Yosemite Museum Program Records. Yosemite National Park Archives

Acquisition Information

Museum Program records consist of eleven separate accessions, all but two representing field collections by Yosemite National Park Staff: Accession YOSE-05794 was transferred from the Denver Service Center to the Library and Museum in 1992; accession YOSE-07518 was delivered to the Research Librarian by the family of former Librarian Steven Medley in 2013. Several accessions (YOSE-05793, YOSE-05879, YOSE-06936, and YOSE-05994) were originally stored in the Museum Building attic, and transferred to a climate controlled facility in El Portal after construction was completed in 1997. Accessions include: • YOSE-05793 - transferred from the Denver Service Center, acquisition date: December 20, 1992; drafts and records gathered for the Design and Installation of a Fire Detection and Suppression System, Wawona Hotel Complex, by Anthony Crosby and Nick Scrtattish. • YOSE-05879 – field collection; acquisition date: July 15, 1993; records from the curator’s office. • YOSE-05959 – field collection; acquisition date: July 13, 1994; records from the Yosemite Centennial Exhibit at the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco. • YOSE-05994 – field collection; acquisition date: September 15, 1994; records of Craig Bates regarding the Indian Cultural Program and the Indian Cultural Exhibit. • YOSE-06400 – field collection; acquisition date: March 16, 1999; ethnographic interviews of Native American community members by Brian Bibby. • YOSE-06790 – field collection; acquisition date: April 8, 2005; records of Museum Program Chief Dave Forgang. • YOSE-06814 – field collection; acquisition date: August 27, 2005; chronological files of Park Historian James B. Snyder from 1988-2004. • YOSE-06936 – field collection; acquisition date: 2005; museum records held by the Interpretation and Education Division. • YOSE-07180 – field collection; acquisition date: September 13, 2011; Museum exhibit guest books held by the Interpretation and Division. • YOSE-07518 – donation by Jane Medley; acquisition date: May 16, 2014; correspondence of Steven Medley from 1975-1978 while serving as Research Librarian. • YOSE-07567 – field collection; acquisition date: November 19, 2014; reports and meeting notes from the desk files of the Research Librarian.

Biography/Administrative History

The Yosemite Museum Program's inception can be credited to Ansel Hall (1894-1962), who first came to Yosemite in 1919. One year later, Hall was appointed information ranger and his first project was to expand exhibit space from the chief

Yosemite Museum Program

Records

YC: 1026 (YOSE 237704)
records. By 1922, discussions regarding the need for dedicated “fire proof” museum space intensified due to several circumstances -- growing numbers of park visitors, the donation of a valuable Indian basket collection, and the creation of a new Park Naturalist Department lead by Hall. Architect Herbert Maier (1893-1969) provided a building design, and The Yosemite Museum Association (later known as the Yosemite Natural History Association) was created to manage individual donations for the project. Hall gained support for his enterprise from Hermon C. Bumpus (1862-1943), the first president of the American Association of Museums. The association's Committee on Museums in National Parks (later, the Committee on Outdoor Education) viewed Hall's project as an important test case for a public education program. Bumpus recommended the project to the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial Fund in New York, and Yosemite was awarded a $50,000 grant in 1923. The Museum Building site was chosen by Thomas Vint (1894-1967) of the National Park Service Landscape Design Office, which was located in Yosemite until it moved to Los Angeles 1923. Vint’s vision was to create an administrative center that was in balance with the landscape and also architecturally harmonious. Maier’s museum design fit well with Los Angeles architect Myron Hunt’s (1968-1952) vision for the Administration Building and Post Office -- prototypes for what was to be known as National Park Service Rustic Style architecture. The Museum Building's exterior construction was completed in 1924, however another year was needed for exhibits to be researched, planned, and prepared. Displays, furniture, and library books also needed to be moved from the Jorgensen studio. By 1925, the two story building was complete and contained a library, classroom, offices, caretaker quarters, and storage. It was the first building constructed as a museum in the park service system. The Museum officially opened to the public on May 29, 1926, and on October 29, 1926, the American Association of Museums transferred ownership of the building to the National Park Service. Museum displays presented the natural and cultural history of Yosemite in a chronology beginning with the valley’s geological formation. Exhibits continued into exterior space at the rear of the building with a coach and wildflower garden. The stairway landing to the second floor housed an insect display and led to a “Tree Room,” “Flower Room,” lecture room, darkroom, offices, and caretaker quarters. By 1927, a reconstructed Indian dwelling and acorn granary had been added to the wildflower garden area. Yosemite's library, originally known as the Yosemite Museum Nature Library, was the first formal library created in the national park system. Originally located in the west wing of the Museum's first floor, the collection included research and reference materials of natural and cultural history, with an objective to serve the needs of naturalists and researchers, as well as students of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History. The library collection developed from donations by visitors, organizations, institutions, and from funds raised and distributed through the Yosemite Natural History Association (later known as the Yosemite Association). Throughout the following decades there were many changes to the Museum Building. The Research Library operated with assistance from a series of students during the summer, and eventually moved into the naturalist's study room on the second floor. Museum display areas were converted into space for offices and storage when a new Visitor Center opened in 1967. Museum exhibits were donated to Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, the building was renamed the Valley District Building, and the main entrance area was blocked and converted into the District Court Room. In the 1970s, some of the building’s original function for research, education, and interpretation began to be restored. Plans for an Indian Cultural Exhibit began in 1975. Curators selected objects from storage, designed displays, and developed interpretive programs. The new exhibit opened to the public in 1976. Ten years later, a gallery for temporary exhibits was created from office space on the first floor, and the building’s main front entry leading from the park’s administrative center was recreated. The first Yosemite Records Center was created by 1975 and located in the Valley District (Museum) Building attic where it was managed by the research librarian. In 1989, the park appointed a historian with responsibilities for the care of growing archival collections. By 1997, a prefabricated, climate-controlled building was installed within covered storage in El Portal, 17 miles from the museum and library collections. Although most archival material was moved to this location, rare books and some collections of historic photographs remained in the Research Library and Museum. The park’s first archivist was hired in 2005. Offices and storage facilities for the Yosemite Archives are currently located in EL Portal. The Archives contain over three million items documenting the history of the park, park partners, and concessionaires, including administrative records, photographs, motion picture film, maps, plans, and oral histories. The Archives also contain a collection of approximately 90,000 slides created between 1938 and 1999 for education and interpretation. The Research Library and its two branch libraries in Wawona and Tuolumne Meadows circulate over 2,000 items per year. Reference assistance is also provided to hundreds of researchers each month. The collection consists of approximately 12,000 volumes on cultural and natural history, as well as operational activities of the park, including 5,000 circulating books and 2000 rare books. The Research Library also currently maintains 20,000 black and white cataloged photographs dating from the late 1800s to the present, and houses vertical files of thousands of reports, offprints, photocopies, and copy prints. As its mission statement summarizes, the Yosemite Museum Program’s current role is to preserve records, natural specimens, and human cultural artifacts that help document and define Yosemite National Park, facilitate public interpretation and enjoyment, and aid research for society’s benefit. The program currently meets this mission through the management of museum, library, and archive collections, and by participation in special initiatives and projects. Over 1.7 million museum objects encompass a broad range of subject areas relevant to the Yosemite Museum Program.

Yosemite Museum Program Records

YCN: 1026 (YOSE 237704)
park, including the fine arts, history, transportation, archaeology, ethnography, biology, geology, and paleontology. The Museum supports interpretive themes through the Indian Cultural Exhibit, Visitor Center, Museum Gallery, Wilderness Center, El Portal Transportation Exhibit, Mariposa Grove Museum, and the Thomas Hill Studio in Wawona. The program also facilitates special projects in the arts, including the Artists-in-Residence Program and the Yosemite Renaissance. The Museum Program operates as a branch of the Interpretation and Education Division. The Branch Chief or Chief Curator directs the program and currently manages activities of the museum curator, registrar, museum technician, research librarian, archivist, and archive technician. In the past, Museum Program staff also included a historian and a curator of ethnography. Until 1985, Museum Program activities were directed by the Chief Naturalist (later known as Chief Interpreter) including Ansel Hall (serving from 1922 to 1923), Carl P. Russell (serving from 1923 to 1929), C. A. Harwell (serving from 1929 to 1940), C. Frank Brockman (serving from 1941 to 1946), Donald Edward McHenry (serving from 1947 to 1956), Douglass H. Hubbard (serving from 1956 to 1966), William Jones (serving from 1969 to 1972), David Karraker (serving from 1972 to 1974), and Leonard W. McKenzie (serving from 1975 to 1984).

Scope and Content of Collection

In general, arrangement proceeds from records generated and collected by museum leadership to papers reflecting daily operational activities and projects of program staff. The original organization of records has been maintained where possible. Records are divided into seven series: Series I, Office of the Program Chief; Series II, Operations, Curation, and Collection Management; Series III, Exhibits; Series IV, Records of the Historian; Series V, Historic Preservation; Series VI, Native American Consultation and NAGPRA; and Series VII, Projects.

_Yosemite Museum Program Final FA 2017_