Yosemite Association 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
2016
Yosemite Association Records

Descriptive Summary

Title: Yosemite Association Records

Dates: 1923-2010, bulk dates 1930-2004

Collection Number: YCN: 2007 (YOSE 229332)

Creator/Collector:

Extent: 84 linear feet (161 manuscript boxes, 9 oversized boxes, 1202 prints, 327 negatives, 129 slides, and 41 transparencies)


Repository: Yosemite National Park Archives
El Portal, California 95318

Abstract: This body of records represents the activities of the Yosemite Association (YA), also known as the Yosemite Natural History Association (YNHA). It also contains records representing the activities of the Yosemite Fund (YF), reflecting its work as a special committee of the YA until its incorporation as an independent entity in 1988. Records reflect the organization’s operational policies, governance, management, revenue stream, aid-to-NPS, partnerships, and programs of research, education, publication, outreach, and service. With a bulk of the records dating between 1960 and 2009, most represent activities under the leadership of Business Manager Henry Berrey, President Steven Medley, and Chief Executive Officer David Guy and their staff members. Although operations of the organization were directed by a series of chief naturalists and chief interpreters, few records from these individuals appear to be incorporated here other than some correspondence. Similarly, Board of Trustee records reflect interaction with various directors rather than in depth documentation of activities. Exceptions are several folders donated by Board Member Ed Hardy, containing many documents stamped “YP&CC.” Few records predate 1960. A 1969 report by Edwin C. Alberts, Cooperating Association Coordinator for the Western Region, noted that files were “voluminous and in some disorder,” perhaps an indication of shifting terms of leadership by chief naturalists. Evidence also exists for the periodic destruction of records as projects ended or employees departed. Alberts noted that when Nature Notes ceased, its subscription and membership list was destroyed. A 1987 letter from a former business manager to Steven Medley also mentions that several boxes of papers were discarded. In 2008, a record retention policy was also instituted by David Guy following National Park Service guidelines.

Language of Material: English

Access

Although this collection is open to the general public, many files contain personal or sensitive information and are therefore restricted at the discretion of the Archivist. This includes some individual documents within files and a few entire folders within some subseries.

Preferred Citation

Yosemite Association Records. Yosemite National Park Archives

Acquisition Information

Yosemite Association Records constitute at least two donations. Accession 5648 contains 12 folders of Board meeting materials donated by former Board Member Ed Hardy covering the period 1985-1988. These records came to the Research Library and Archives on May 2, 1989. They were accessioned by Yosemite Museum staff and stored in the museum attic. Under the direction of Archivist Paul Rogers, these and other Yosemite Association records from the attic were transferred to the El Portal Storage Building. Records were later integrated and inventoried by an archive technician in October 2011. The museum attic records totaled 8.5 LF and included 5 record storage boxes, 5 manuscript boxes, and 2 oversized boxes. Accession 07145 was donated to the archives by the Yosemite Conservancy after its creation from the merger of the Yosemite Association with the Yosemite Fund in January 2010. Archive staff transferred files and associated materials from filing cabinets and storage areas of the Conservancy office into record storage boxes and created a transfer inventory. The donation totaled 55 LF and included 53 record storage boxes and 2 oversized boxes. Fifteen of the record storage boxes were labeled “Steve Medley’s Office.”

Biography/Administrative History

Authorities trace the beginnings of the Yosemite Association (YA) to the creation of the first museum in the national park system. This achievement involved the activities of Ansel Hall, Yosemite’s first chief naturalist, who converted six rooms of the former Jorgensen Studio for museum use in 1921. By 1922, 33,000 people had visited the museum, and discussions began regarding a new facility. These deliberations captured the interest of the American Association of Museums Committee on Museums in National Parks (later the Committee on Outdoor Education). Seeing an opportunity for an experiment to equip and build a park museum, committee members facilitated a $50,000 grant from the Laura Spellman...
Rockefeller Memorial Fund in New York. In 1923, the Yosemite Museum Association was created to secure these funds. Founders included Ansel Hall; Joseph Grinnell, Director of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley; Barton W. Evermann, Director of the California Academy of Science; and William Frederic Badè, President of the Sierra Club. The park installed a cornerstone for the new museum in 1924, and Hall left the National Park Service (NPS) payroll temporarily to be its “executive agent.” The first museum exhibit to be built was the Glacier Point Lookout, or Geology Hut designed by Herbert Maier and completed in 1925. A two-story museum building was completed the same year in Yosemite Valley, and included rooms for a library, classrooms, offices, caretaker quarters, and storage. Exhibits were completed in 1926 and the museum opened to the public shortly thereafter. As plans for the new museum were implemented, the mission of the Yosemite Museum Association was broadened to include gathering and disseminating information on the park, furthering scientific investigation, and maintaining a research library. To reflect these new objectives, the Yosemite Museum Association was renamed the Yosemite Natural History Association (YNHA), and Articles of Incorporation were drafted in 1925, serving as a model for the creation of park cooperative associations decades later. An illustrious eleven member advisory board of specialists guided the mission of the YNHA. As of 1932, members included Dr. Harold C. Bryant, National Park Service; C.N. Goethe, Capitol National Bank; Chauncey J. Hamlin, Buffalo Museum of Science; Professor Willis L. Jeppson, University of California, Berkeley; Dr. A.L. Kroeber, University of California, Berkeley; Professor Joseph N. Le Conte, University of California, Berkeley; Dr. Francois E. Matthes, U.S. Geological Survey; Dr. Harvey Monroe Hall, Carnegie Institute Laboratory, Stanford; Dr. Carl P. Russell, Yellowstone National Park; Dr. Ray Lyman Wilbur, President of Stanford and Secretary of the Interior under President Hoover; and Robert Sterling Yard, Executive Secretary of the National Parks Association. The Articles of Incorporation also defined a five member board of trustees. Original members included naturalist Bert Harwell, painter and writer Della Taylor (Mrs. Herman H. Hoss), painter Harry C. Best, Yosemite physician Dr. Harley Dewey, and Judge J. M. Oliver. Originally, terms of service lasted until death or resignation at which time replacements were appointed. YNHA activities were directed by the chief naturalist, who during the earliest years included Ansel Hall (1922-1923) and Carl P. Russell (1923-1929). 1925 also marked the beginning of YNHA’s support of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History, established by the National Park Service and California Fish and Game. Based on studies of outdoor education in Europe, this innovative program brought students out of labs and into the park for seven weeks during the summer to learn observational techniques in the field. In 1930, under the direction of C.A. Harwell (1929-1940), YNHA supported the creation of another educational program, the Junior Nature School, precursor of the Junior Ranger program. The first printed version of Yosemite Nature Notes also appeared 1925. Having begun in 1922 as a series of mimeographs, it was written by park naturalists and printed by naturalist staff. The newsletter documented Yosemite activities and presented this information to the public. By 1935, YNHA received memoranda from the National Park Service confirming its approval as a cooperative association. However, attempts to incorporate the organization before World War II fell short, and under the directorship of C.A. Harwell or C. Frank Brockman (1941-1946), programs such as the Yosemite School of Field Natural History went on hiatus during the war. YNHA consolidated and grew during the post war era. Articles of incorporation were filed with the state of California in 1947, and Fresno’s Crown Printing and Engraving Company began printing Yosemite Nature Notes, having already produced special issues. YNHA also assumed responsibility for the Yosemite School of Field Natural History from 1951 until 1954. During the same period, it created a revolving fund for land acquisition, purchasing 25 lots in Foresta and others in El Portal for the National Park Service. Book publishing also surged with the production of such works as Miwok Material Culture by S. A. Barrett and E.W. Gifford and One Hundred Years in Yosemite by C. P. Russell. YNHA directors during the post war period were Donald Edward McHenry, serving from 1947 to 1956, and Douglass H. Hubbard serving from 1956 to 1966. Momentum slackened for YNHA in the 1960s. Yosemite Nature Notes ceased publication in 1961 (with final issues dated 1962) due to increasing production costs as well as increasing responsibilities of park naturalists. Since membership was directly tied to newsletter subscriptions, YNHA also lost its membership base. Lack of staff support also contributed to a slowing pace, since the organization’s only employees other than park naturalists were seasonal and part-time sales clerks. In 1969, Edwin C. Alberts, NPS Western Regional Cooperative Association Coordinator, visited Yosemite and made several suggestions in a report. One recommendation was for YNHA to amend its by-laws by broadening the membership of the Board of Trustees to include a mix of NPS staff, concessioners, and friends of the park, as was currently common with other cooperative associations. He also advised the organization to broaden its membership with dues paying members including park employees, concessioners, and visitors. Alberts also noted that YNHA’s Articles of Incorporation were unique in stating that the organization’s purpose was to aid the national park system, not only Yosemite National Park. This allowed YNHA to aid other organizations in California while most other West Coast societies restricted themselves from doing so. Chief Naturalist William Jones directed YNHA operations from 1969-1972, and during this time the organization was revitalized. Henry Berrey began as managing editor in 1971, having left his position as publicist with the Yosemite Park and Curry Company when it was sold. Berrey expanded the publications program and reinstated a membership program. He was also involved in the development of the Field Seminars Program (forerunner of Outdoor Adventures), the first program of outdoor education courses for the public in the national park system. A precursor program began in 1971 as “Discovery Weeks” with Naturalist William Neeley as
In the 1980s, Yosemite Natural History Association (YNHA), led by Executive Director Susan Singer with President Robert Hanson, expanded its programs during the mid-1980s and 1990s. A grant-making foundation with its own board council and board of trustees was established in July 1989, Board Chairman Peterson replaced Ellie completed his term. The new chair, Richard Peterson, lobbied for independence from YA – a proposal already presented by Nishkian. The National Park Service supported this move, and the YA Board created the Yosemite Foundation (d.b.a. Yosemite Fund). In February 1988, the Fund was incorporated as an independent, non-profit, fundraising and grant-making foundation with its own board council and board of trustees. In July 1989, Board Chairman Peterson replaced Executive Director Susan Singer with President Robert Hanson. YA expanded its programs during the mid-1980s and 1990s. In 1994, support began for a series of evening programs called Yosemite Theater, and in 1995, the Wilderness Center office moved from the Yosemite Valley into a two story building known as Bagby Station in El Portal outside of the park’s boundaries. The station was built in 1907, and until 1945, used as a stop between Merced and El Portal on an 80 mile route along the Merced River. It had also been used for housing by the subsequent owner, Della Gress. In 1973, YNHA purchased the building from the Merced Irrigation District and moved it to El Portal with plans by Director Douglas Hubbard to create a transportation museum. When museum development failed due to lack of funds, the building was reconfigured for office space. At the same time as these changes, the Board also renamed the Superintendent’s Special Committee as the Yosemite Fund (YF). Steven Medley coordinated operations in the San Francisco office as part-time executive director of the Fund and Mary Lou Edmonson was hired to serve as development officer. Susan Singer, a former fundraiser for the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, was brought to the organization as executive director. By 1986, the Fund had awarded its first grants totaling $76,187. As the Yosemite Fund was gaining momentum, Chairman Byron Nishkian died and his wife Tuolumne, supplementing the work of summer interpretive staff. Henry Berrey’s interest in financial support to expand the intern program and Superintendent Robert Binnewies’ concerns for implementing the 1980 General Management Plan led to Board discussions about a fundraising campaign. In 1982, the YNHA Board asked consulting firm McManis and Associates to complete a fundraising feasibility study. The consultants recommended a merger of the YNHA with the Yosemite Institute (YI) to create a foundation. The McManis proposal was dropped when YI declined to consider this option and the NPS Western Regional Office expressed discomfort with cooperating association fundraising. In 1983, the YNHA Board hired consulting firm Lavendar/Rice to complete another study. These consultants proposed the creation of a select committee specifically for fundraising. Consequently, the Board formed the Superintendent’s Special Committee, chaired by Byron Nishkian of San Francisco, a colleague of consultant David Rice. Committee members from Los Angeles and the Central Valley were sought to create a broad base for the solicitation of donations. The fundraising effort was named the “Return to Light Campaign” and its objective was to raise 52 million dollars. It became the first fundraising effort of the national park system. With the fundraising campaign in motion and the retirement of Business Manager-Editor Henry Berrey imminent, YNHA began a search to fill a new position that would include these responsibilities as well as those previously held by the chief naturalist (re-titled chief interpreter in 1972). In May 1985, Steven Medley joined the YNHA as its president. Medley first came to Yosemite as a seasonal employee after graduating from Stanford in 1971. He later became a ranger and naturalist, and with an MLIS from the University of Oregon, served as librarian and museum curator. He returned to Yosemite as YNHA president after receiving a J.D. from the University of California Davis in 1981 and practicing law in Grants Pass Oregon for four years. With Medley’s appointment, the chief interpreter’s role shifted to park liaison. YNHA’s last director from the National Park Service was Leonard W. McKenzie, Chief Interpreter from 1975 to 1984. Shortly after Medley’s arrival in 1985, the Yosemite Natural History Association was renamed the Yosemite Association, although in legal documents, it remained the Yosemite Natural History Association (d.b.a. the Yosemite Association). In correspondence to Quickenden Lamington of the Natural History Association, Queensland Australia, Medley explained this change as an effort to ease confusion with the general public about the organization’s scope. In 1986, Yosemite Association offices moved from the Yosemite Valley into a two story building known as Bagby Station in El Portal outside of the park’s boundaries. The station was built in 1907, and until 1945, used as a stop between Merced and El Portal on an 80 mile route along the Merced River. It had also been used for housing by the subsequent owner, Della Gress. In 1973, YNHA purchased the building from the Merced Irrigation District and moved it to El Portal with plans by Director Douglas Hubbard to create a transportation museum. When museum development failed due to lack of funds, the building was reconfigured for office space. At the same time as these changes, the Board also renamed the Superintendent’s Special Committee as the Yosemite Fund (YF). Steven Medley coordinated operations in the San Francisco office as part-time executive director of the Fund and Mary Lou Edmonson was hired to serve as development officer. Susan Singer, a former fundraiser for the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, was brought to the organization as executive director. By 1986, the Fund had awarded its first grants totaling $76,187. As the Yosemite Fund was gaining momentum, Chairman Byron Nishkian died and his wife Ellie completed his term. The new chair, Richard Peterson, lobbied for independence from YA – a proposal already presented by Nishkian. The National Park Service supported this move, and the YA Board created the Yosemite Foundation (d.b.a. Yosemite Fund). In February 1988, the Fund was incorporated as an independent, non-profit, fundraising and grant-making foundation with its own board council and board of trustees. In July 1989, Board Chairman Peterson replaced Executive Director Susan Singer with President Robert Hanson. YA expanded its programs during the mid-1980s and 1990s. In 1994, support began for a series of evening programs called Yosemite Theater, and in 1995, the Wilderness Center opened, staffed by Association volunteers. The organization also initiated a campaign to “Keep Bears Wild” by educating the public on methods to discourage scavenging bears. Publishing efforts escalated by placing books with some of the largest distributors in the U.S., creating and distributing book catalogs, and retaining an independent book representative, Wilcher and Associates to promote YA’s publications across the Western states. Medley also entered books in publishing competitions, and from 1994-1995, won 15 Excellence in Interpretation Awards from the National Park Service, including...
the prestigious Director’s Award twice. YA publications received other awards from the American Association of Museums, and the American Association for State and Local History. The Field Seminar Program was also lauded by the National Park Service in 1994 as the best interpretive program offered by a cooperating association in the national park system. By 1997, a total of 997 participants were enrolled in over 64 seminars. The achievements of the 1990s were occasionally offset by political and financial tensions during the same time period. YA’s comments in support of a Wild and Scenic designation for the Merced River and the effort to Save Mono Lake were viewed as inappropriate by Superintendent Finley, and this controversy sparked comment in local newspaper articles and editorial pages. After the devastating 1997 flood, tension also existed between YA and YF as both lobbied for donations to aid recovery. To avert any conflicts, YF proposed an agreement with YA focusing on complimentary roles and collaborative fundraising, member solicitation, facility planning, and projects. By 1999, Beth Pratt was hired as vice-president to help manage YA, but by 2002, the organization was undergoing significant financial stresses. The Board of Trustees, now totaling 16 members, assumed responsibility, and the treasurer and finance committee chair stepped down. The Board expanded Beth Pratt’s position to officially include the responsibilities of chief financial officer, and requested an evaluation of all programs. A business plan sought funds to support the Publication Program. In October 2006, YA experienced another crisis when President Steven Medley was killed in an automobile accident. Beth Pratt served as interim president until the Board’s selection of David Guy as chief executive officer in June 2007. Under Guy’s leadership, program partnerships were established or confirmed with the YF for the Junior Ranger program, Heyday Books in Berkeley for publishing, and with the National Park Service, as guidebooks were tailored to specific areas of Yosemite. Guy also finalized a new Memorandum of Understanding to operate the reservation systems of the Wilderness Center and Ostrander Ski Hut, initiated a board member evaluation protocol, and continued the annual spring forum for members. As the Board and new chief executive officer established YA’s future direction, the impact of the nation-wide economic downturn could not be ignored. In 2009, YA submitted a letter to YF suggesting a Joint Sustainability Task Force created from each organization’s board. The Task Force hired consultants from the firm La Piana, who surveyed members, other cooperating associations, and NPS staff. The consultants concluded that a merger of YA and YF would benefit both organizations, and the National Park Service supported the proposal to merge. In December 2009, both organizations signed a merger agreement, operating on by-laws similar to those of the YF. All YF board members remained board trustees, and all YA board members were invited to join an existing Board Council. Some YA board members also became members of the Board of Trustees, and David Guy was temporarily retained as a consultant. Two new committees were added to existing YF committees -- an Education and Programs Committee, and a Sales and Publications Committee. All YA members and YF donors were retained as “Friends” and offices remained in El Portal and San Francisco. The merged organization, named the Yosemite Conservancy, was formally launched on January 2010. Information for this summary was gathered from correspondence, reports, and manuscripts in the collection including those of Henry Berry, Steven Medley, David Guy, and former YA Board Chairman Thomas Shephard. Another source was the 1969 report of Edwin C. Alberts, NPS Cooperating Association Coordinator for the Western Regional Office (Series I, Subseries E, Folder 13). Information was also collected from “The Yosemite Association: 80 Years of Support for Yosemite,” Yosemite, vol. 65, no. 3, Summer 2003 and the Yosemite Conservancy’s web site at www.yosemiteconservancy.org  

**Scope and Content of Collection**  
In general, the arrangement of records proceeds from documents generated by and about the organization’s governing leadership to papers reflecting daily operational activities. The original organization of the records has, for the most part, been maintained in two series -- Series I: Director’s Office Records, and Series II: Business Office Records. The Yosemite Association files also included several types of loose items appearing to be unassociated with specific records. These have been arranged by material type into three series -- Series III: Yosemite Association Publications; Series IV: Ephemera; and Series V: Photographic Material. With the exception of Series IV, all series are subdivided further into subseries. Slides, transparencies, nitrate and acetate negatives, polaroid prints, magnetic and electronic media, and oversized materials were separated from the collection and stored according to special needs for preservation. Separation sheets note storage location and original context. Duplicates were removed from the collection and held for return to the donor.

[Yosemite Association Records Finding Aid](www.yosemiteconservancy.org)