
Wawona Washburn Hartwig Papers

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2017

Descriptive Summary

Title: Wawona Washburn Hartwig Papers

Dates: 1834-2000, bulk dates 1961-2000

Collection Number: YCN: 2005 (YOSE 232958)

Creator/Collector:

Extent: 7.0 linear feet

Online items available  <https://voro.cdlib.org/user-pdf-dav/yosnpa/WWH%202017.pdf>

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Abstract: The Wawona Washburn Hartwig Papers contains materials including original correspondence, notes, deed reproductions, legal records, articles, forms, maps, brochures, pamphlets, event programs, newspaper clippings, magazines, newsletters, stationary, menus, paperback publications, reviews, journal reproductions, postcards, polyester and acetate negatives, photographs, a scrapbook, a passport, insurance information, hair samples, manuscript drafts, slides, and DVDs of digitized materials in the collection. Much of the material corresponds to Wawona Hartwig's research efforts in writing her own childhood memoirs, her family history, as well as assisting Shirley Sargent with her book on the Wawona area. The collection also contains several unpublished manuscript drafts that provide anecdotal information and history on the Wawona Hotel in the early 1900s.

Language of Material: English

Access

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

Preferred Citation

Wawona Washburn Hartwig Papers. Yosemite National Park Archives

Acquisition Information

The collection was created by Wawona Washburn Hartwig and was donated to the Yosemite Archives by Jack Gyer and Diane Mello on March 22, 2006. Tom Bopp borrowed the collection's files from Jack Gyer after Wawona Hartwig's death, and he arranged and labeled some folders. The primary accession number is YOSE-06849.

Biography/Administrative History

Wawona Washburn Hartwig was born in the Wawona Hotel in Yosemite National Park, CA on June 17, 1914. Her father Clarence Washburn's first marriage had ended in divorce; his second, to Grace Brinkop, resulted in her birth. Clarence also adopted Grace's child from a previous marriage, Thomas. Her parents had originally named her Estella Florence Washburn in honor of her two grandmothers, however, from the time of her infancy until her death, she was known as "Wawona". Wawona grew up at the hotel where she was born, spending the winter months in Oakland and San Francisco. She was an accomplished horseback rider, preferring to spend most of her free time riding her favorite horse, Marcheta (during the time that the Wawona Meadow landing strip was still in use, her job upon hearing an airplane arrive was to ride to the meadow in order to clear it of livestock). She attended Sequoia High School in Redwood City, and then matriculated to the University of California at Berkeley, where she studied journalism and had the opportunity to write for several newspapers, including the San Francisco Examiner. However, Wawona ended her academic pursuits early due to "personal reasons". When Wawona was 17, she moved to Hollywood and signed a contract with Paramount Pictures, working as a movie extra on several films. She was able to exhibit her horsemanship skills as a stunt double for Lupe Velez in the 1929 film "Tiger Rose", part of which was filmed in the Mariposa Grove. While in Hollywood, she met MGM actor Hale Hartwig, and they married in 1936. The newlywed couple decided to leave behind their acting careers in pursuit of a more private lifestyle in Indio, California. After her husband's death from illness in 1960, Wawona Hartwig became connected with the Hollywood Church of Religious Science, eventually receiving her certification as a minister of the church. While living in Beverly Hills, she held a series of secretarial jobs for several companies and notable actors, such as Vincent Price, Groucho Marx and Fred Astaire. In 1985 she moved to Oakhurst, where she spent the last years of her life volunteering at the Children's Museum of the Sierra and performing historical research for the Yosemite Research Library. She died on October 7, 2000 at Clovis Community Medical Center from complications following a heart attack. The Washburn family history has been traced back to the 13th century in England. Wawona's grandfather, John Washburn, along with his brothers Henry and Edward, established and operated the Wawona Hotel in the 1879, a family operation that continued until 1933. They also organized the creation of many roads through Wawona and Yosemite, from stagecoaches to automobiles. The Washburns had a long history with the Bruce family, as business partners, employers, and in the case of Henry and Jean Bruce Washburn, spouses (it was Jean Washburn who suggested that the hotel complex known as Big Tree Station be changed to

the Native American word 'wah-wo-nah', meaning 'big tree'). The Bruce connections to John Jay Cook via Jean's sister Fannie were what initially financed the Washburn livery business in Mariposa, a business which eventually changed hands, but the partnerships between the families remained firm through Big Tree Station, Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Company, and eventually, the Wawona Hotel enterprise. Another Washburn brother, John, whose first wife and child died in YOSE 232958 2 1875, married young Estella Hill in 1885. Estella was the daughter of famous landscape artist Thomas Hill, who was renowned for his paintings, many of which were on the subject of Yosemite. Hill's studio, originally located in Yosemite Valley, was destroyed by high winds. John had a new studio constructed for Thomas Hill in 1886, located in Wawona. John and Estella Washburn had one child, a son named Clarence Arthur Washburn. As prolific as the family history may be, the history of the Wawona Hotel was equally shaped by its employees. The laundry and kitchen was staffed by Chinese immigrants, who would often return to Wawona each year for work during the hotel season. Wawona was praised for its food, presided over by Chinese cook Ah You, who continued to make his famous pies until 1919. Ah You was discovered in a mining camp in the early 1880s, and fans of his pies included the local children and Theodore Roosevelt. Wawona Hotel also had its own garden and livestock, promising fresh food to be available for the guests' meals. Another employee legacy was the Gordon family, beginning with Pete Gordon as a pioneer guide, and his son Tom, who worked for Henry Washburn as a school boy. Tom and his own sons would later work as stagecoach drivers. In all, four generations of Gordons would work for the Washburn Family, ending with Albert Gordon. After John Washburn died in 1917, his son Clarence, who was then Assistant Manager, became Manager of the Wawona Hotel. With the advent of automobiles, guests desired more entertainment than the quiet meadows and idyllic landscapes that the hotel had to offer. Under Clarence Washburn's guidance, two buildings, a golf course, airplane landing strip, and swimming pool were added for the guests' enjoyment. Several other events served to spice up life at Wawona, including rodeos and a small Yosemite-based baseball league, with the Wawona team playing against those from Yosemite, Mariposa, and Sugar Pine. Clarence, who played baseball while at UC Berkeley, often played first base himself. Prior to 1932, Wawona was still privately owned land, and the National Park Service was eager to acquire the Wawona Basin for several reasons. One of those reasons was that the Wawona road would make the park more accessible, due to its modern construction catered for automobiles. Wawona was also home to much of Yosemite's high country, as well as the Mariposa Grove. The Park Service was also concerned about conservation in Wawona - if it was able to annex the area, then the Park Service would be able to control fires in the Grove, logging activities, as well as regulating illegal behavior such as bootlegging alcohol. In 1932, the land was sold to the government, while the hotel and many of the buildings were sold to The Curry Company. Clarence was asked to stay on as manager of the hotel, but he completed his last season in August of 1934. Later that year, he was instated as manager of the Hotel Potter in Indio, California, where he worked for most of his later life. He died in 1972. Wawona Washburn Hartwig worked for many years compiling research on the history of Wawona, its employees, the Washburn family, and on writing and publishing. She was quietly working on a manuscript about her childhood at the Wawona Hotel, completing several unpublished chapters and amassing a large amount of research files which comprises the bulk of the collection. She also assisted Shirley Sargent on several of her books about Yosemite, particularly Yosemite's Historic Wawona.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Papers have been divided into six subject series: Series I: Clarence Washburn Diaries; Series II: Research Files [A to Z]; Series III: Manuscript Materials; Series IV: Family Materials; Series V: Postcards; and Series VI: Photographs.
