

Frank Latta Papers

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Yosemite National Park Archives

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<http://www.nps.gov/yose/historyculture/collections.htm>

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Frank Latta Papers

Dates: 1922 - 1985

Collection Number: YCN: 2003 (YOSE 115196)

Creator/Collector:

Extent: 27.5 LF

Online items available  <https://voro.cdlib.org/user-pdf-dav/yosnpa/Latta%20updated%20FA%202016.pdf>

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Abstract: Latta's notes refer to Native Americans by their anglicized names but by their Indian names in his books. A cross-index is provided below to correlate the two. Indian and anglicized names appear especially in Latta's field notes but also figure prominently on the notes for photographs. This list is alphabetical by Indian name, using Latta's orthography, with anglicized name and tribe following, when known. Ah-kah-kih-nim Blind Molly [Lawrence], Wukchumne Yokuts Ah-shah'-co-lit Mary Garcia, Yokuts Cha-ahm-sah Dick Francisco, Koyeti Yokuts Chapulin Martin Estrada Es'-tik Lucy Dick, Entimbts Yokuts Hay'-cow Sam Osborne, Wuksache Yokuts Hih'-lah-loo Wilson Lewis, Patwin I'-chow Henry Icho, Wukchumne Yokuts Lah-wan-nil George Garcia, Tache Yokuts Las'-yeh Mrs. Dick Francisco, Bancalache Yokuts Law-naw'-see Joe Vera, from Tule River Lee'-mee Chris Brown, Miwok Loi-eh-yets Dan Williams, Koyeti Yokuts Low-hi Dick Sampson, from Dunlap Low-how-she Joe Wilcox, Yaudanche Yokuts Maht'-chah James Alta, from Tule River Nen'-wut Josephine Atwell, Wechikit Yokuts Oot-som'-yet Mrs. Nick Sisco, from Lemoore Pahmit William Wilson, Dumna Yokuts Pay'-mi Henry Johnson, Pe-loo'-nee Miwok Pohut Joe Pohut, Wukchumne Yokuts Sah-lee-mah-suh Jose Juan Olivas Sho-shin Susie Medley, Dumna Yokuts Sow-sut Rosa Domingo, Choinimnee Yokuts Taw-pin-naw Jim Tawpaw, Wukchumne Yokuts Totuya Maria Lebrado, Miwok Wah'-cho Gervasio Pierre Lopez, Honoumne Yokuts Wah-hum'-chah Henry Lawrence, Yowlmaynee Yokuts Wah-nom'-kot Aida Icho, Wukchumne Yokuts Wah-sis'-cot Mary Tipp, Nutunutu Yokuts Wah-tuh-che Pete Barrios, Tache Yokuts Way'-sheem-let Minnie Wilcox, Wukchumne Yokuts Wee-ah'-lates Sam Garfield, Wukchumne Yokuts Wow'-ee-ll Ramon Enjinio Ya-a'-lut Mary Pohut, Wukchumne Yokuts Yah-wah'-cut Annie Jackson, Nutunutu Yokuts Yeh-see'-nut Mary Tipp, Nutunutu Yokuts Yoi'-mut Josie Alonzo, Chunut and Wowole Yokuts Yow-wis'-nut Julia Davis, Choinimnee Yokuts.

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

Frank Latta Papers. Yosemite National Park Archives

Acquisition Information

Collection was offered by Mona (Frank Latta's daughter), and purchased by the Yosemite Association, which donated the collection to the park.

Biography/Administrative History

Frank Forest Latta was born in Orestimba, California, in September 18, 1892, to Presbyterian minister Eli C. Latta and teacher Harmonia Campbell. Latta married Jeanette "Jean" Allen in 1919, and eventually had four children together. From 1915-1945 Latta worked as a teacher in the southern San Joaquin Valley, teaching mechanical drawing and agriculture. However, his true passion lay in the study of California history, a curiosity which was ignited when he interviewed early pioneers in 1906 for a school project. Latta continued interviewing and researching the history of the San Joaquin Valley even as he was teaching, which led him to stumble on to the story of an old white pioneer who had been raised by the Yokuts, an Indian tribe of central California. This man was Thomas Jefferson Mayfield, and his experience, which Latta published first as a series of newspaper articles, became the basis of Latta's first book *Uncle Jeff's Story: A tale of a San Joaquin Valley pioneer and his life with the Yokuts Indians* (1929). Latta's interviews with Mayfield led to a lifelong interest in the Indian people of the central and southern San Joaquin Valley, particularly the Yokuts and the Miwok. In order to better understand Yokuts culture, Latta studied different dialects and supplemented his knowledge by corresponding with anthropologists of his day, like linguist and ethnologist John P. Harrington, with whom he formed a close friendship. Latta also interviewed many members of the Yokuts and Miwok tribes, taking meticulous notes and eventually developing his own system to record the particular speech and memory of his subject. The interviews were so essential to his research that Latta would spend years tracking down individuals with first-hand knowledge of important events and stories. Some of his most important books, like *California Indian Folklore* (1936) and *Handbook of Yokuts Indians* (1949), drew from his

research on California Indians. Latta also contextualized his interviews with local Indians by continuing his research of early California and San Joaquin Valley history. He sought information anywhere he could find it, including personal and corporate papers, and more notably, newspapers. Latta would search for old newspapers and index and sort the relevant information, allowing him to publish well-research historical accounts of the area like *El Camino Viejo a Los Angeles* and *Black Gold in the Joaquin*, also published in 1936 and 1949, respectively. Latta's interest in history and California Indians extended far beyond academic research. In 1952, for example, he learned that allotments of some of his Yokuts friends were about to be sold by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which prompted him to organize people to stop the sale. He felt deeply that the problems faced by Indian people in the 20th century were directly related to the 1815 treaties and reservation system in the southern San Joaquin Valley, and thought that greater understanding of the causes of these problems would lead to possible solutions. This belief led him to help found the Kern County Museum in Bakersfield in 1941; he wanted people to know their own history and understand the history of the place in which they lived. Latta retired from teaching and worked as the museum curator and director from 1945-1956, allowing him to focus on history full time. While at the Kern County Museum Latta also established the Bear State Museum and Bear State Books, the one to house his collections and the other to publish his work. In 1946, Latta and his family moved to Santa Cruz, where he established the Rancho Gazos Historical Indian and Early Californian Museum. He continued to write and publish books about the San Joaquin Valley, early Californian settlers and Californian Indians. Towards the end of his life, Latta wrote prolifically, publishing *Dalton Gang Days*, *Saga of El Rancho Tejon*, and *Tailholt Trails* in 1976, *Death Valley '49ers* in 1979, and *Joaquin Murrieta and His Horse Gangs* in 1980. Even with all these publications, Latta left behind a wealth of unpublished information when he died in 1983. Fortunately his papers have been housed and protected at several institutions. In 1987, with the financial assistance of the Yosemite Fund, the ethnographic papers of Frank Latta came to the Yosemite National Park Archives. These papers, inventoried below, are only a piece of Latta's incredible legacy.

Scope and Content of Collection

The ethnographic papers of Frank Latta fall into five groups: Field Notes, Correspondence, Manuscripts, Sources, and Photographs. Within those groups, Latta's filing system has been maintained for the most part. Field Notes and Correspondence are organized alphabetically by the name of the person or organization generating the material. Manuscripts are organized alphabetically by title. Sources are organized by author, title, or subject, as Latta filed them. Photographs, once they were cataloged will be presented also by Latta's system, which was organized alphabetically by person, place, or subject name. In the course of his work, Latta amassed a mind-boggling amount of material which even he had some trouble keeping organized. Over the course of time he developed duplicate files of the same name; those have ordinarily been combined in the records here. Only in the Manuscripts group has that consolidation been difficult because Latta reused so much of his material several times in different publications or in different versions of the same publications. As much as possible, the manuscripts are organized in chronological sequence within each title.

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