
William L. Neely Papers

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Yosemite National Park Archives

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

2016

Descriptive Summary


Title: William L. Neely Papers

Dates: 1942-1993, bulk dates 1942-1978

Collection Number: YCN: 2025 (YOSE 232957)

Creator/Collector:

Extent: 7 linear feet

Online items available 

https://voro.cdlib.org/user-pdf-dav/yosnpa/William%20L.%20Neely_Final_Finding%20Aid_July_2014.pdf

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Abstract: The William L. Neely Papers, 1942-1978 will be arranged to reflect long-time Yosemite Naturalist William L. Neely's journals and incidental writings. The journals are rich with detailed nature observations and sketches of plants. Peppered in are fragments of plant specimens, sketches, letters, photographs, postcards, newspaper articles, and wine labels. During his lifetime Neely's publications were mainly featured in the Yosemite Nature Notes, with occasional letters to columnists and editors. These journals were initially given to Allan Shields by Chris Neely, William Neely's oldest son. Shields has published four books from the journals, which he titled: *Wild Bill Neely and The Pegan Brothers' Golden Goat Winery*, 1992; *O.S.S.: One Sad Sack: Pvt. Neely Disciplines the Military*, 1994; *A Yosemite Naturalist Odyssey*, 1994; and *Wilderness Treks by Foot, Canoe, and Adobe Rocket and Father's Far-Flung Fables*, 1995. The collection also houses a sketchbook of Neely's drawings and sketches, plant specimens that Neely collected over the years in his journals, photographs and letters addressed to Neely and to Shields.

Language of Material: English

Access

No restrictions.

Preferred Citation

William L. Neely Papers. Yosemite National Park Archives

Acquisition Information

These journals were created and written by William Neely documenting many years of his life as an YNP Naturalist.

Biography/Administrative History

William Lewis Neely (1923-1985), a long-time Yosemite Naturalist, was born on July 24 in Los Angeles, California. He had a multifarious persona with many gifts: artist, potter, oenologist and wine connoisseur, vinegar-maker, biologist, ranger, fire-fighter, teacher, poet, philosopher, traveler, musician, folk-dancer, actor, linguist and polyglot, father-of-six—but above all, he was a Naturalist, in the Ecological tradition of John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. Neely began writing journals in 1939, and continued up until 1978; even adding notes as late as 1984, but later destroying the journals of 1939-1941. After graduating from the University High School, West Los Angeles in 1940, Neely studied life sciences and the German language at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for two years, until WWII took him to the U.S. military and an extended duty with the O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services, later called the C.I.A., Central Intelligence Agency). After WWII, Neely enrolled at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), with plans to complete a Ph.D. in Ecology — a term with a limited usage at the time. In 1949, Neely met the legendary Naturalist and botanist Carl Sharsmith, who urged him to consider attending the Yosemite Field School. In 1950, Neely entered the Field School, and in 1951 began serving as a seasonal Ranger-Naturalist in Yosemite Valley and at Glacier Point. Over the next 25 years, with a few brief interruptions, Neely served in Yosemite Valley, Tuolumne Meadows, Bridalveil Creek Campground, White Wolf Campground, and led guided "loop" trails: seven-day trips through the High Sierra Camps of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company. Neely also served as a field instructor in the Yosemite Institute and became the first Director of Field Activities. On August 7, 1985, Neely died in his sleep, in Santa Barbara, California.

Scope and Content of Collection

The arrangement will consist of five series and six subseries outlined below. Series I: Journals and Incidental Writings comprise 36 years of journal entries of William L. Neely, arranged chronologically, including diary entries, philosophical musings, poems and fables. Some entries were added at the back pages of the journals up until 1984. "The Big Fat Book" covers 33 years of writings kept simultaneously with Small Journals, and will be separated from the latter to form two subseries. Series II: Sketchbook consists of sketches and drawings, while traveling, kept separately from the rest of the journals. Due to their fragility, plant specimens, found throughout the journals, will be separated and arranged chronologically, in relation of their placement in the journals. Series III will contain photographic materials, separated into

two subseries of originals and photocopies, arranged, to the extent possible, chronologically. Series IV: Correspondence will consist of two subseries: letters to Neely from Kathy Russell, the daughter of British philosopher Bertrand Russell, and letters to Allan Shields from Neely's friends, arranged chronologically. Series V will contain two cassette tapes, labeled Jack Ash Society.

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