

## **Guide to the Helen J. Stewart Papers**

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
<b>Creator:</b>	Stewart, Helen Jane Wiser
<b>Title:</b>	Helen J. Stewart Papers
<b>ID:</b>	MS-00171
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1869-1978
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1900-1959 (bulk)
<b>Physical Description:</b>	1.84 Cubic Feet (4 boxes, 1 oversized folder)
<b>Physical Description:</b>	2.67 Linear Feet
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English
<b>Abstract:</b>	The Helen J. Stewart Papers (1869-1978) document the life of Las Vegas, Nevada pioneer, Helen J. Stewart. It includes correspondence between Stewart and her children as well as various family legal papers and certificates. The collection also contains Helen J. Stewart's 70th birthday scrapbook, a ledger, and a day book from 1904-1919, as well as several photo albums and information related to the family burial plot.

### Preferred Citation

Helen J. Stewart Papers, 1869-1978. MS-00171. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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## Biographical Note

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Helen Jane Stewart was born in 1854 in Springfield, Illinois. When she was nine years old, the family moved to Nevada, and then to Sacramento, California in 1863. Helen was educated in Sacramento and, in 1873, she married Archibald Stewart in Stockton, California.

Archibald Stewart operated a freighting business in Pioche, Nevada, and he and Helen lived there during Pioche's boom years. The Stewarts' first three children were born in the Pioche area; William James in 1874; followed by Hiram Richard less than two years later; and Flora Eliza Jane (known as Tiza) in 1879. In 1879, Archibald Stewart loaned O.D. Gass, the owner of the Las Vegas Ranch, \$5,000, with the ranch as collateral. By 1881, Gass had defaulted on the loan and eventually Archibald decided to move his family to the Las Vegas Ranch. In 1882 the family moved from Pioche to the ranch. Shortly after their arrival, Helen gave

birth to Evaline La Vega, known as Eva. The Stewarts settled into running the ranch as a farm and way station for travelers.

In 1884, tragedy struck when Archibald was killed at the neighboring Kiel Ranch. The controversy surrounding the killing exists to this day. Helen was pregnant at the time of Archibald's death, and later that year she and her family traveled to Galt, California, while her father, Hiram Wiser, took over operation of the ranch. In Galt she gave birth to a son, Archibald. She then returned to the ranch. Over the next several years, Helen attempted to sell the ranch, however, no sale occurred. In 1889, talk of a railroad to be built through the Las Vegas Valley and the Muddy Valley prompted Helen along with other members of her family, to purchase large tracts in land. During this period, the Stewart children were taught by a tutor at the ranch. The three younger children were sent to school in California beginning in 1897. Then, in July, 1899, her youngest and favorite, Archie, was killed chasing wild horses on the ranch.

By 1902, the railroad through Southern Nevada was becoming a reality and Helen sold the Las Vegas Ranch to the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad. A four-acre parcel was reserved as the family burial site. In 1903, she moved her family to Los Angeles. Shortly thereafter, her son Hiram died, leaving a wife and two children. Also in 1903, Helen married Frank Stewart, who had been hired at the Las Vegas Ranch in 1886. The Stewarts purchased land near the ranch and in late 1903, returned there to join in the building of a thriving community, based on the arrival of the railroad. For the next twenty years, Helen was a part of the social, political, and business life of early Las Vegas and was an early member of the Mesquite Club. She became an authority on state history and developed an extensive collection of Indian baskets, which had the reputation of being the finest in the state. She was appointed by Governor Boyle as a delegate to the Twelfth Annual Convention for the American Civic Association in Washington D.C. in 1915. Later that year, she became the first woman elected to the Clark County School Board.

In 1918, Frank Stewart died of cancer, and Helen's mother, Delia Gray Wiser, passed away the following year. Helen later became ill with cancer, and in 1924, was taken to Los Angeles for treatment. On March 6, 1926, she passed away. Businesses in Las Vegas closed for the day her funeral and people came from all areas of the state to attend the funeral of the woman who has been described as "The First Lady of Las Vegas."

Sources:

Townley, Carrie Miller, "Helen Stewart", Nevada Historical Society Quarterly, Winter, 1973 and Spring, 1974.

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## Scope and Contents Note

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The Helen J. Stewart Papers cover the years 1869-1978, with the bulk of the material dated 1900 to 1959 and include correspondence between Helen J. Stewart and her children as well as various family legal papers and certificates. Also included are Helen J. Stewart's 70th birthday scrapbook, a ledger, and a day book from 1904-1919, as well as several photo albums and information related to the family burial plot. Sprinkled throughout the collection are what appear to be Stewart's writings and notes on various topics. An oversize

folder contains several land patents and the marriage certificate of Helen and Frank Stewart. These items have been photocopied and included in their appropriate places within the collection.

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## Administrative Information

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### Access

Collection is open for research.

### Publication Rights

Materials in this collection may be protected by copyrights and other rights. See [Reproductions and Use](#) on the UNLV Special Collections website for more information about reproductions and permissions to publish.

### Acquisition Note

Materials were donated in 1980 by Clinton E. Stay, Jr. and Evelyn Stay Moden; accession number T-87.

### Processing Note

Collection was processed in 1980 by Carol A. Corbett. In 2017 Joyce Moore revised and enhanced the collection description to bring it into compliance with current professional standards.

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## Related Materials

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### Separated Materials

Some of the photographs in this acquisition were removed from the collection and placed in Helen J. Stewart Photographs, 1869-1978. PH-0104. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada.

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## Names and Subjects

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- History -- Las Vegas -- Nevada
- Las Vegas Ranch (Nev.)
- Ranches -- Nevada -- Las Vegas
- Ranchers -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- Biography
- Stewart family
- El Dorado Canyon (Nev.) -- Pictorial works
- Mesquite Club (Las Vegas, Nev.) -- History
- Photographs
- Stay, Evaline Stewart

## Collection Inventory

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Title/Description	Containers	
City of Las Vegas Building Codes, notices, correspondence, 1956-1959 and undated	box 1	folder 1
Correspondence, 1869-1899	box 1	folder 2
Correspondence, 1900-1909	box 1	folder 3
Correspondence, 1910-1919	box 1	folder 4
Correspondence, 1920-1929	box 1	folder 5
Correspondence, 1940-1978 and undated	box 1	folder 6
Las Vegas Age, 1906 May 26	box 1	folder 7
Miscellaneous documents, 1884-1943, undated	box 1	folder 8
Newspaper clippings, 1897-1955, & undated	box 1	folder 9
Real estate documents, 1882-1899	box 1	folder 10
Real estate documents, 1900-1909	box 1	folder 11
Real estate documents, 1910-1919	box 1	folder 12
Real estate documents, 1920-1929	box 2	folder 1
Real estate documents, 1930-1939	box 2	folder 2
Real estate documents, 1940-1949	box 2	folder 3
Real estate documents, 1950-1959	box 2	folder 4
Real estate documents, 1960-1969	box 2	folder 5
Real estate documents, undated	box 2	folder 6
Real estate tax records, 1931-1954 and undated		

	box 2	folder 7
Stay Estate, bank statements, 1947-1948	box 2	folder 8
Stay Estate, documents and notes, 1946-1952 and undated	box 2	folder 9
Stewart Family, banking records and miscellaneous receipts, 1904-1948 and undated	box 2	folder 10
Stewart Family, burial site, 1957-1973 and undated	box 2	folder 11
Stewart Family histories, undated	box 2	folder 12
Stewart Family, legal papers and certificates, 1873-1903 and undated	box 2	folder 13
Autograph Book, William Stewart, 1889-1895	box 3	folder 1
Birthday Scrapbook, Helen J. Stewart, 1924	box 3	folder 2
Columbia Theater Program Book, 1904	box 3	folder 3
Day Book, 1904-1919	box 3	folder 4
Ledger, 1930	box 3	folder 5
Scrapbook of poetry and other clippings, undated	box 3	folder 6
Photograph and negative of Will of Helen J. Stewart, 1918	box 4	folder 1
Photograph removed from City Building Codes file, undated	box 4	folder 2
Photograph "Dining Room, Vegas, 1907"	box 4	folder 3
Portrait negative, unidentified woman, undated	box 4	folder 4
Portrait of Idah Meacham, 1875	box 4	folder 5
Negatives of Helen J. Stewart gardens and basket collection, undated	box 4	folder 6
Color negatives, undated	box 4	folder 7
Stewart family burial site, excavation photographs, undated	box 4	folder 8
Stewart family burial site, excavation negatives, undated	box 4	folder 9
Photo album, "Souvenir of Eldorado Canon", undated	box 4	folder 10
Photo Album, undated	box 4	folder 11
Photo Album, undated	box 4	folder 12
Photo Album, undated	box 4	folder 13
Photo Album, undated	box 4	folder 14
Photo of horse belonging to Evelyn Stewart, undated	box 4	folder 15
Land Patents and Marriage Certificate of Helen and Frank Stewart (copies included in appropriate places in collection)	folder	Oversize