

Guide to the Wilbur and Toni Clark Papers

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Summary Information

Repository:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator:	Clark, Wilbur, 1908-1965
Title:	Wilbur and Toni Clark Papers
ID:	MS-00361
Date [inclusive]:	1944-1991
Date [bulk]:	1953-1963
Physical Description:	2.81 Cubic Feet (4 boxes)
Physical Description:	3.22 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	The Wilbur and Toni Clark Papers date from 1944 to 1991, with the bulk from 1953 to 1963 and document the lives of Wilbur and Toni Clark in Las Vegas, Nevada and the development of the Desert Inn Hotel and Casino. The collection includes correspondence from Wilbur Clark to those he identified as important individuals including government officials and celebrities. It also includes materials related to Clark's plan of building luxury apartments near the Desert Inn, and newspaper clippings and scrapbooks about the Clarks and the Desert Inn. The collection contains some audiovisual materials including Wilbur and Toni Clark's home movies, news footage, and film footage of Las Vegas, Nevada and the Desert Inn.

Preferred Citation

Wilbur and Toni Clark Papers, 1944-1991. MS-00361. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Biographical Note

Wilbur Clark (1908-1966) developed and designed the Desert Inn Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. As the head of the resort, he promoted the Desert Inn and Las Vegas throughout the nation.

Born to Shirley and Lulu Clark in Keyesport, Illinois on December 27, 1908, Wilbur Clark moved to San Diego, California at sixteen. He worked a series of jobs before moving to Reno, Nevada in 1951 and starting

a career in gaming. After several years in Reno, he moved to Las Vegas in 1938 and, with several partners, opened a casino on Boulder Highway.

In 1944, Wilbur married Toni Gaglianese and in the same year he purchased the El Rancho Vegas. He also opened the Monte Carlo Club on Fremont Street in Las Vegas. He sold the two properties and used the proceeds to build a new resort, the Desert Inn. After running out of funds due to rising costs, Clark sold a majority interest in the Desert Inn to Moe Dalitz and the resort opened April 24, 1950. Clark added an eighteen-hole golf course the next year. The new resort attracted many prominent guests and received national attention. Clark sold his interest in the Desert Inn in 1964.

In addition to the Desert Inn, Clark also built the Paradise Gardens housing development, naming the streets after himself and his family. He also served as mayor of the township of Paradise Valley. Clark passed away from a heart attack in 1965.

Toni served as a glamorous co-host to her husband Wilbur at the Desert Inn. Born Lena Gaglianese on April 4, 1915 in Seattle, Washington she later moved to Reno where she met Wilbur Clark. After her marriage, she was recognized for her fashion and style. After the Desert Inn opened, she helped plan parties and entertained guests at the resort. After Wilbur Clark died, she remained active in philanthropy in Las Vegas and supported the Variety Club and the Nevada Dance Theater. She later married her long-time friend Larry Finuf. Toni Clark passed away on October 4, 2006.

Sources:

Jeff Burbank. Online Nevada Encyclopedia, "Desert Inn." May 19, 2011. <http://www.onlinenevada.org/articles/desert-inn> Accessed April 6, 2018.

"Las Vegas Loses Its First Lady," Las Vegas Sun, October 6, 2006.

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Scope and Contents Note

The Wilbur and Toni Clark Papers date from 1944 to 1991, with the bulk from 1953 to 1963 and document the lives of Wilbur and Toni Clark in Las Vegas, Nevada and the development of the Desert Inn Hotel and Casino. The collection includes correspondence to Wilbur Clark to those he identified as VIPs, including elected officials and celebrities, such as include Presidents Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard Nixon as well as Nevada politicians including Pat McCarran and Alan Bible. The collection also contains correspondence from non-government important individuals including Billy Graham, Jimmy Durante, and Jack Benny. The correspondence highlights Clark's promotion of the Desert Inn and his emphasis on hospitality and building relationships. Other materials describe Clark's proposed construction of building luxury apartments near the Desert Inn, and newspaper clippings and scrapbooks about the Clarks and the Desert Inn, documenting their lives and Wilbur Clark's vision for the hotel and casino. The collection contains some audiovisual materials including Wilbur and Toni Clark's home movies, news footage, and film footage of Las Vegas, Nevada and the Desert Inn.

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Arrangement Note

Materials remain as they were received.

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Administrative Information

Access Note

This collection is open for research. If use copies of the films do not exist, reformatting/production of use copies is required before access will be granted; this may delay research requests. Advanced notice is required.

Publication Rights

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

Acquisition Note

Materials were donated in 1995 by Toni Clark; accession number 95-49.

Processing Note

Material was processed in 1999 by Gerry Evans. In 2016, Joyce Moore revised and enhanced the collection description to bring it into compliance with current professional standards. In 2018, as part of an archival backlog elimination project, Angela Moor revised the collection description to bring it into compliance with current professional standards. In 2019, Angela Moor added descriptions for the audiovisual material.

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Related Materials

Separated Materials

Some of the photographs in this acquisition were removed from this collection and placed in the Wilbur Clark Photographs, 1910-1975. PH-00302. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Related Collections

The following resource may provide additional information related to the materials in this collection:
 Clark, Toni. Interview, 1996 July 02. OH-02781. Las Vegas Women Oral History Project. Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Names and Subjects

- Casinos -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- History
- Hotels -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- History
- Businesspeople -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- Biography
- Women -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- Biography
- Las Vegas (Nev.) -- History
- Las Vegas (Nev.) -- Biography
- Clark, Toni, 1915-2006
- Desert Inn Hotel and Casino (Las Vegas, Nev.)

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Containers	
Apartment Complex Survey prepared by Horwath and Horwath, 1963-01-30	box 1	folder 1
Biographical Information about Wilbur Clark: articles and newspaper clippings, typewritten biographies, Wilbur Clark's 50th Birthday Party Invitation, 1958, undated	box 1	folder 2
Wilbur Clark's Chateau de Ville Apartments Proposal: includes architectural drawings, cost estimates, descriptions of other Las Vegas apartments, 1962	box 1	folder 3
Correspondence from VIPs (Government): Includes incoming correspondence to Wilbur Clark from government officials including John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Harry S. Truman. Also contains letters from Nevada	box 1	folder 4

politicians including Alan Bible, Patrick McCarran, and Vail M. Pittman. Other correspondence came from state governors, army and navy officials, and various federal office holders. It contains copies of some outgoing correspondence from Wilbur Clark to John F. Kennedy, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard Nixon, as well as other government officials, 1950-1963

Correspondence from VIPs (Non-Government): Contains letters to Wilbur Clark from Jackie Kennedy, Billy Graham, Ed Sullivan, Jack Benny, Jimmy Durante, Debbie and Eddie Fisher, the Duchess of Windsor, Toots Shor, John Charles Daly, and Al Davis, 1955-1964	box 1	folder 5
Desert Inn's First Anniversary Party: Includes sheet music to "I've Got a Date With Wilbur" by Ted Mossman, press releases, and a print of the Clark family crest, undated	box 1	folder 6
Duplicate black-and-white photographs from Wilbur Clark Photograph Collection, undated Physical Description: 11 Photographic Prints	box 1	folder 7
Magazines and Programs: American Legion magazine, "Las Vegas Golden Boy: The Hottest Personality on the Nevada Desert is Lucky Wilbur Clark," December 1953; Program, Wilbur Clark's Desert Inn Country Club First Annual Tournament of Champions, 1953 April 23-26; "Fabulous Las Vegas," 1951-08-11; "Desert Inn Country Club News," 1959-08-22; "Nevada Life," 1945 September; "The Las Vegas," 1951, 1945-1959	box 1	folder 8
Clippings: "Panorama Goes Clubbing," photo of Wilbur and Toni Clark, undated; Eddie Griffith, "Wilbur Clark Leave for Las Vegas," 1944-06-13; "Fair Women, Gallant Men Will Be There," Las Vegas Sun, 1961-01-15; "Desert Inn's Wilbur Clark: From Bellhop to Bigshot," undated; "Wins Fashion Honor," 1958-10-29; "The Midnight Earl" about Toni Clark's visit to Howard Hughes, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1971-03-08; "A Town Remembers," Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1983-02-10; undated clipping of Wilbur and Toni Clark in Las Vegas; "Wilbur Clark Acquitted in Tax Case," Los Angeles Herald Examiner, 1954-08-04; "Attend Ball," undated; "Cite Toni Clark as One of 14 US 'Best Dressed,'" 1958-10-28, 1944-1983	box 1	folder 9
Mayor Wilbur Clark, City of Paradise Valley blank stationary, undated	box 1	folder 10
Architectural Drawing, Wilbur Clark's office at the Desert Inn, undated	box 1	folder 11
Photographs, Wilbur Clark: souvenir black-and-white photograph from Hotel Last Frontier with Wilbur Clark and two unidentified men; promotional print of Wilbur Clark, "Never Admit Defeat", undated	box 1	folder 12
Desert Inn Scrapbooks and Oversize Magazines: Scrapbook of newspaper clippings, 1944-1957; Desert Inn Scrapbook, 1950-1965; Profile of Wilbur and Toni Clark home, Los Angeles Examiner, 1959-04-26 (2 copies); "Home Hospitality in Playtown, USA," The Diplomat, 1959-09; "Gambling in the US," Life, 1950-06-19; Wilbur Clark promotional print, "Never Admit Defeat," undated (2 copies)	oversized box 02	
Black and white photograph prints: Wilbur Clark and Rocky Marciano; entrance to Desert Inn; Wilbur Clark and Bob Hope; Desert Inn pool; Desert Inn front entrance; Wilbur Clark and CA Governor Jerry Brown; Wilbur Clark, Bill Radkovich, and Rocky Marciano; Ruby Keeler, Debbie Reynolds, Frank Mudica, and Toni Clark; Toni and Wilbur Clark at home; Christmas 1958 at Clark residence, 1958, undated	oversized box 02	
Audiovisual Material, 1948-1958		
NBC, Las Vegas, approximately 1953	box 03	

Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Las Vegas, America's Fun Capitol, undated	box 03
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Wilbur Clark Kine CBS, undated	box 03
Physical Description: 2 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Wilbur Clark Kine, SD000232, undated	box 03
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Wilbur Clark Cine, SD000231, undated	box 03
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
CBS Cronkite Insert News, undated	box 03
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Tee Marvels, Columbia Pictures, undated	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Long Monarchs of the Ring, 3rd ed., undated	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Aquatic Carnival, Columbia Pictures, undated	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Hotel Footage, Gambling Las Vegas, undated	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, color	
Home movies, Palm Springs, undated	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, color	
Home movies, Dairy Farm, Wilbur's brother's farm, undated	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, color	
Home movies, Hawaiian Vacation, undated	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, color	
Home movies, Vacations: Ponds Lodge; Jackson Hole, WY; Wilbur's birthday party, San Diego, CA; Trips to Mexico City, 1948	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, color	
Home movies, Vacations: New York and Chicago, undated	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, color	
Hollywood Park, horse race, 1958 July 19	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
Golden Gate Fields, horse race, Dumpty Humpty, 1957 November 02	box 04
Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white	
First Transcontinental Jet Passenger Flite, New York Spotlight News, American Airlines release print, undated	box 04

Physical Description: 1 Reels 16 mm, black-and-white

When Magoos Flew, Columbia Pictures, undated

box 04

Physical Description: 1 Reels 8 mm, black-and-white

Audio recording of radio interview sent from Al Blake to Wilbur Clark, 1963 May
04

box 04

Physical Description: 1 Reels 4 inch Scotch recording reel