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Summary Information

Creator: Clark, Wilbur, 1908-1965
Title: Wilbur and Toni Clark Papers
ID: MS-00361
Date [inclusive]: 1944-1991
Date [bulk]: 1953-1963
Physical Description: 0.89 Cubic Feet (2 boxes)
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 VIPs including government officials and celebrities. The collections 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.

Preferred Citation


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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 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 Gaglionese 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 Gaglionese 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:

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. VIPs 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 VIPs 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 Desert Inn.

Arrangement Note
Materials remain as they were received.
Administrative Information

Access
This 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 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.

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:
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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title/Description</th>
<th>Containers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Apartment Complex Survey prepared by Horwath and Horwath, 1963-01-30</td>
<td>box 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical Information about Wilbur Clark: articles and newspaper clippings, typewritten biographies, Wilbur Clark's 50th Birthday Party Invitation, 1958, undated</td>
<td>box 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilbur Clark's Chateau de Ville Apartments Proposal: includes architectural drawings, cost estimates, descriptions of other Las Vegas apartments, 1962</td>
<td>box 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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 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</td>
<td>box 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>box 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert Inn's First Anniversary Party: Includes sheet music to &quot;I've Got a Date With Wilbur&quot; by Ted Mossman, press releases, and a print of the Clark family crest, undated</td>
<td>box 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplicate black-and-white photographs from Wilbur Clark Photograph Collection, undated</td>
<td>box 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Description: 11 Photographic Prints</td>
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<td>Magazines and Programs: American Legion magazine, &quot;Las Vegas Golden Boy: The Hottest Personality on the Nevada Desert is Lucky Wilbur Clark,&quot; December</td>
<td>box 1</td>
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Mayor Wilbur Clark, City of Paradise Valley blank stationary, undated

Architectural Drawing, Wilbur Clark's office at the Desert Inn, undated

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


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

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