

Guide to the Helen J. Stewart Papers

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.

Box 457010

4505 S. Maryland Parkway

Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-7010

special.collections@unlv.edu

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Summary Information

Repository:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator:	Stewart, Helen Jane Wiser, 1854-1926
Title:	Helen J. Stewart Papers
ID:	MS-00171
Date [inclusive]:	1869 to 1978
Date [bulk]:	1900 to 1959
Physical Description:	1.43 Cubic Feet (4 boxes, 1 oversized folder)
Physical Description:	2.92 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	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 photograph albums and information related to the family burial plot.

Preferred Citation

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

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Biographical Note

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

The Helen J. Stewart Papers cover the years 1869-1978, with the bulk of the material dated 1900 to 1959 and includes 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 photograph albums and information related to the family burial plot. The collection contains Stewart's writings and notes on various topics, as well as several land patents and the marriage certificate of Helen and Frank Stewart.

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Administrative Information

Access

Collection is open for research.

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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

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 and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Names and Subjects

- Las Vegas (Nev.) -- History
- Las Vegas Ranch (Nev.)
- Ranches -- Nevada
- El Dorado Canyon (Nev.) -- Pictorial works
- Mesquite Club (Las Vegas, Nev.) -- History
- photographs
- Stay, Evaline, 1882-1947
- Stewart Family

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Containers	
City of Las Vegas building codes, notices, correspondence, 1956-1959, undated	box 01	folder 1
Correspondence, 1869-1899	box 01	folder 2
Correspondence, 1900-1909	box 01	folder 3
Correspondence, 1910-1919	box 01	folder 4
Correspondence, 1920-1929	box 01	folder 5
Correspondence, 1940-1978, undated	box 01	folder 6
Las Vegas Age, 1906 May 26	box 01	folder 7
Assorted documents, 1884-1943, undated	box 01	folder 8
Newspaper clippings, 1897-1955, undated	box 01	folder 9
Real estate documents, 1882-1899		

	box 01	folder 10
Real estate documents, 1900-1909	box 01	folder 11
Real estate documents, 1910-1919	box 01	folder 12
Real estate documents, 1920-1929	box 02	folder 1
Real estate documents, 1930-1939	box 02	folder 2
Real estate documents, 1940-1949	box 02	folder 3
Real estate documents, 1950-1959	box 02	folder 4
Real estate documents, 1960-1969	box 02	folder 5
Real estate documents, undated	box 02	folder 6
Real estate tax records, 1931-1954, undated	box 02	folder 7
Stay Estate, bank statements, 1947-1948	box 02	folder 8
Stay Estate, documents and notes, 1946-1952, undated	box 02	folder 9
Stewart Family, banking records and receipts, 1904-1948, undated	box 02	folder 10
Stewart Family, burial site, 1957-1973, undated	box 02	folder 11
Stewart Family histories, undated	box 02	folder 12
Stewart Family, legal papers and certificates, 1873-1903, undated	box 02	folder 13
Autograph book, William Stewart, 1889-1895	box 03	folder 1
Birthday scrapbook, Helen J. Stewart, 1924	box 03	folder 2
Columbia Theater program book, 1904	box 03	folder 3
Day book, 1904-1919	box 03	folder 4
Ledger, 1930	box 03	folder 5
Scrapbook of poetry and other clippings, undated	box 03	folder 6
Photograph and negative of Will of Helen J. Stewart, 1918	box 04	folder 1
Photograph removed from City Building Codes file, undated	box 04	folder 2
Photograph "Dining Room, Vegas", 1907	box 04	folder 3
Portrait negative, unidentified woman, undated	box 04	folder 4
Portrait of Idah Meacham, 1875	box 04	folder 5
Negatives of Helen J. Stewart gardens and basket collection, undated	box 04	folder 6

Color negatives, undated	box 04	folder 7
Stewart family burial site, excavation photographs, undated	box 04	folder 8
Stewart family burial site, excavation negatives, undated	box 04	folder 9
Photo album, "Souvenir of Eldorado Canyon", undated	box 04	folder 10
Photo Album, undated	box 04	folder 11
Photo Album, undated	box 04	folder 12
Photo Album, undated	box 04	folder 13
Photo Album, undated	box 04	folder 14
Photo of horse belonging to Evelyn Stewart, undated	box 04	folder 15
Land Patents and Marriage Certificate of Helen and Frank Stewart, 1892-1929	flat file 05	