



Guide to the Bill Willard Papers

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Summary Information

Repository:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator:	Willard, Bill
Collector:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Arnold Shaw Popular Music Research Center
Title:	Bill Willard Papers
ID:	MS-00435
Date [inclusive]:	1887-1999
Physical Description:	22.20 Cubic Feet (52 boxes)
Physical Description:	20.45 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	This collection is comprised of the personal papers of noted Las Vegas entertainment writer, producer, and critic Bill Willard, which date from 1887 to 1999. It contains material on his father's theater and political involvements as well as Willard's early childhood and high school years. His time in the United States Army is chronicled by the editorials and correspondence he wrote. His papers trace his continued involvement in writing, entertainment, and art which culminated in his direction of the Arnold Shaw Popular Music Research Center. The collection also includes pictures of his artwork, articles he wrote for various newspapers and magazines, scripts, skits, jokes, awards, over 700 audio cassette recorded interviews done for the "Rap with the Artist" series, and personal memorabilia.

Preferred Citation

Bill Willard Papers, 1887-1999. MS-00435. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Biographical Note

Las Vegas entertainment writer, producer, and critic William Norman (Bill) Willard was born April 27, 1913 in Terre Haute, Indiana. His father, James Bassett Willard was a playwright, actor, comedian and theatrical producer, which sparked Bill's interests in all aspects of entertainment and fine arts. He began art and theater studies in 1930. In 1933 he took a job with the Civilian Conservation Corps in Northern California as a camp newspaper editor. He went to New York in 1934 where he obtained a working scholarship at the Art Students League. He began exploring popular music in the city clubs and hotels with mentors like Thomas (Fats) Waller and bandleader Don Bedman. He also worked as a sketch artist and painted murals for the 52nd Street Downbeat Club and the new Cotton Club in midtown for 35 cents an hour. Willard worked briefly as a display artist for Lord and Taylor Department Store, and after five years in New York he moved to Southern California to work for Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills. It was a new store and he was able to receive and execute his first major sculpture commission, "The Four Seasons," and also presented his first wood carvings there. This led to a period of owning his own display business and creating art items for department stores all over the United States.

Willard was drafted into the Army where he worked in the special services at Torney General Hospital in Palm Springs and Birmingham Hospital in Van Nuys, California. While there, Willard produced and wrote radio shows, emceed and writing radio broadcasts. One of his tasks was producing and narrating the annual Christmas shows heard nationwide, and ultimately worldwide, on the Armed Forces Radio Network. He also held art classes for the patients. After his Army discharge in 1946, Willard continued writing, producing, and hosting many shows for the Armed Forces Radio in Hollywood. In 1948 he became involved in writing and producing early television pilots. His agent brought him to Las Vegas in 1949 to create a network radio show, "Honeymoon Hotel," to be broadcast from the Last Frontier Hotel and Casino. The project was abruptly aborted when his agent vanished, leaving Willard without any resources. Rather than returning to Hollywood, he stayed in Las Vegas. His first job was to write and produce a local game show. Willard also produced his own star talk show, "The Green Room," and the first request a classical recording show on early Channel 2 television, and he introduced the first jazz radio show to Las Vegas on KRAM.

In 1949 the Thunderbird Hotel and Casino became the initial site for the first Press Club "Branding Iron Revue" and Willard was given writing and directing assignments. This was the start of many successful years of association with the Press Club. In 1951 he became the director of the Community Players with many performances in the War Memorial Building, which later became City Hall. That same year, he performed in the Birdcage Theatre at the Last Frontier Village in "M'Liss," a melodrama. As a result of his success, he was contracted to write for and act with Hank Henry. This began Willard's five year association with the Silver Slipper as writer, composer, and character actor/straight man for Henry. During this period, Willard was writing a daily column for the Las Vegas Sun and became the first entertainment editor of the morning edition. In addition, he was reviewing shows and contributing articles to Down Beat magazine and columns for the Los Angeles Herald-Express.

After Willard left the Silver Slipper in 1955 he concentrated on creating a one-man art show. This effort produced a near sellout of his artwork that was displayed at the Main Las Vegas Library. In 1960 Willard produced another one-man art show with a Las Vegas theme and it moved to the Geminaire Galleries in New York City and West Galleries in Dallas. He became executive director of the newly formed Nevada State Council on the Arts.

Willard worked as commentator for the atomic testing at the Nevada Test Site and co-anchor of the nightly news on KSHO-TV. He also did voiceovers and on-camera appearances for commercial spots and contributed political commentary on KLAS-TV. From 1964 to 1967 Willard served on the Las Vegas Beautification Committee, and from 1971 to 1973 he was vice-chairman and chairman of the Las Vegas Planning Commission. During the 1970s and 1980s Willard co-starred in five plays at the Meadows Playhouse. In 1983 he joined the staff of the Las Vegas Review Journal as their entertainment, concert, and theater critic. He became a member of the Advisory Board and later in 1989, Director of the Arnold Shaw Popular Music Research Center. He initiated the "Rap with the Artist" sessions with top performers, composers, bandleaders and those affiliated with pop music resulting in over 700 taped interviews.

William Norman Willard passed away January 5, 2000.

Sources:

"William 'Bill' Willard." Find A Grave. December 6, 2008. Accessed June 10, 2020. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/32017183/william-willard>

"Longtime entertainment critic Willard dies at 89." *Las Vegas Sun*. January 31, 2000. Accessed June 10, 2020.

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Scope and Contents

This collection is comprised of the personal papers of noted Las Vegas entertainment writer, producer, and critic Bill Willard, which date from 1887 to 1999. It contains material on his father's theater and political involvements as well as Willard's early childhood and high school years. His time in the Army is chronicled by the editorials and correspondence he wrote. His collection traces his continued involvement in writing, entertainment, and art which culminating in his final contribution of directing the Arnold Shaw Popular Music Research Center. The collection also includes pictures of his artwork, articles he did for various newspapers and magazines, scripts, skits, jokes, awards, over 700 audio cassette recorded interviews done for the "Rap with the Artist" series, and personal memorabilia.

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Arrangement

The collection is organized into four series:

Series I. Personal papers;

Series II. Civic Activities;

Series III. Publications;

Series IV. Writings and interviews

Papers are arranged alphabetically.

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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 2001 by Lucy Willard; accession number 2001-017. Materials were collected by the director of the Arnold Shaw Popular Music Research Center; subsequently the materials were transferred to the University Libraries Special Collections and Archives.

Processing Note

Material was processed in 2008 by Joyce Moore. In 2016, 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

Taped cassette interviews are located a cabinet in the main stacks area in Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Some of the photographs in this acquisition were removed from the collection and placed in the Bill Willard Photographs, 1887-1999. PH-00333. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Related Collections:

The following resources may provide additional information related to the materials in this collection:

Arnold Shaw Collection, 1927-2006. MS-00432. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. Cork Proctor Collection, 1942-2012. MS-00445. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Names and Subjects

- Branding iron review
- Radio programs -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- History
- Television programs -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- History
- Musicians -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- Biography
- Actors -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- Biography
- Journalists -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- Biography
- Artists -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- Biography
- Theater -- Production and direction -- Las Vegas (Nev.) -- History
- Casinos -- Marketing
- Popular music -- Nevada -- Las Vegas -- History
- photographs
- Willard, James Bassett, 1859-1947
- Townsend, Brigham M., 1907-1987
- Liberace Foundation
- Las Vegas Beautification Committee (Nev.)

Collection Inventory

Series 1: Personal, 1887-1999

Physical Description: 5.60 Linear Feet (13 boxes)

Scope and Contents: The personal papers contain information on J. Bassett Willard, Bill Willard, Armed Forces, artwork material, correspondence, and a reel-to-reel tape.

Arrangement: Material is arranged alphabetically.

Title/Description	Containers	
J. Bassett Willard		
Anti-Saloon League, 1924-1927	box 1	folder 1
Copyright, 1985	box 1	folder 2
Correspondence, 1887-1926	box 1	folder 3
Correspondence, 1922-1925	box 1	folder 4
Musical Plays, undated	box 1	folder 5
Theatrical Works, #1, undated	box 2	folder 1
Theatrical Works, #2, undated	box 2	folder 2
Theatrical Works, #3, undated	box 2	folder 3
Theatrical Works, #4, undated	box 3	folder 1
Theatrical Works, #5, undated	box 3	folder 2
Theatrical Works, #6, undated	box 3	folder 3
Theatrical Works, #7, undated	box 3	folder 4
Bill Willard		
Childhood Art Works, undated	box 4	folder 1
Handwriting Book, 1924	box 4	folder 2
Photographs, undated	box 4	folder 3
School Books, #1, undated	box 4	folder 4
School Books, #2, undated	box 4	folder 5
High School Year Book, 1930	box 4	folder 6
Armed Forces		
Correspondence, 1942-1943	box 5	folder 1
Photographs, undated	box 5	folder 2
Radio Programs, Newsletters, 1940s	box 5	folder 3

Spotlight Bands Radio Program, 1940s	box 5	folder 4
Torney Tattler Newsletter, 1943	box 5	folder 5
VDisc Promotion, undated	box 5	folder 6
"Compendium of Jazz," Armed Forces Radio, 1940s	box 6	folder 1
Artwork		
Artwork, #1, undated	box 7	folder 1
Artwork, #2, undated	box 7	folder 2
Correspondence, 1959-1968	box 7	folder 3
National Advisory Council of the Arts, 1966-1968	box 7	folder 4
Orchestra Photographs, 1940s	box 7	folder 5
Photographs, Art, undated	box 7	folder 6
Awards and Certificates, 1958-1997	box 8	folder 1
Sheet Music, "Las Vegas", undated	box 8	folder 2
Correspondence		
1919-1937	box 09	
1947-1974	box 09	
1975-1984	box 10	
1980-1999	box 11	
Brigham Townsend, 1938	box 11	
Correspondence, undated	box 11	
Music, undated	box 12	folder 1
Audiovisual material	box 13	folder 1
Henri Rene, Las Vegas Rhapsody and Color Glissando, undated Physical Description: 1 Reels	box 13	
"Blackbird", undated Physical Description: 1 Reels	box 13	
Harold Vick, Haitian Ritual and Saga Boy, undated Physical Description: 1 Reels	box 13	
Roosevelt Sypes Sings the Blues, undated Physical Description: 1 Reels	box 13	
Shanty Music Demo, It's Cruel to Be Kind, undated Physical Description: 1 Reels	box 13	
Titled for Arnold Shaw to listen to, undated	box 13	

Physical Description: 1 Reels

Untitled, undated

box 13

Physical Description: 1 U-Matic Videotapes

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Physical Description: 1.8 Linear Feet (4 boxes)

Scope and Contents Note: Materials document the civic activities of Bill Willard including correspondence, photographs, legal papers, a scrapbook variety statements, and contracts. Also included is material on the Liberace Museum.

Arrangement: Material is arranged alphabetically.

Title/Description	Containers	
Anniversary of Gambling, 1981	box 14	folder 1
Beam Music Center, 1992	box 14	folder 2
Best of Las Vegas Awards, 1980	box 14	folder 3
Biographical Material, 1913-1991	box 14	folder 4
BLT Corporation, legal papers, 1963-1964	box 14	folder 5
Bull Fights in Las Vegas, February, 1965	box 14	folder 6
Contracts, undated	box 14	folder 7
Commercial Center Advertising, undated	box 14	folder 8
Colorado River Project, correspondence, 1981-1982	box 14	folder 9
An Evening with the Stars Honoring Bill Willard, 1996	box 14	folder 10
Frank Sinatra Conference, Hofstra University, 1998	box 14	folder 11
Hart Foundation, 1984-1989	box 15	folder 1
Humor and Comedy Course, Richard Stull, undated	box 15	folder 2
Jazz Schedules, Programs and Invitations, undated	box 15	folder 3
Las Vegas Beautification Committee, 1966-1967	box 15	folder 4
Leo Walker Enterprises, 1988-1993	box 15	folder 5
"Let's Dance", correspondence, 1996-1998	box 15	folder 6
Nevada Financial Corporation, legal papers, 1964-1976	box 15	folder 7
Obituaries, entertainers, 1975-1999	box 15	folder 8
Photographs, 1962-1987	box 15	folder 9
Reviews, 1987-1988		

	box 15	folder 10
Scrapbook, 1927-1968	box 16	folder 1
Think Jazz Newsletter, 1978-1982	box 16	folder 2
Townsend, Brigham, 1967-1992	box 16	folder 3
Townsend, Brigham #2, 1931-1976	box 16	folder 4
Tribute to Elvis, 1978, 1999	box 16	folder 5
Variety Statements, 1968-1969	box 16	folder 6
Variety Statements, 1970-1979	box 16	folder 7
Variety Statements, 1980-1989	box 16	folder 8
Variety Statements, 1990	box 16	folder 9
Willard, Frances, 1984	box 16	folder 10
Willard, Lucy Lewin, 1949-1969	box 16	folder 11
Liberace		
Harriet Miller, 1940-1989	box 17	folder 1
"I'll Be Seeing You" book, 1989	box 17	folder 2
Liberace Foundation, correspondence, 1992-1993	box 17	folder 3
Liberace Foundation, financial statements, 1992	box 17	folder 4
Liberace Foundation, legal papers, 1990-1993	box 17	folder 5
Liberace Foundation, minutes and projects, 1992-1993	box 17	folder 6
Museum renovation, 1978-1999	box 17	folder 7

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Series 3: Publications, 1949-1964

Physical Description: 8.35 Linear Feet (20 boxes)

Scope and Contents Note: Material includes the *Branding Iron Review* newsletters and the entertainment critiques Bill Willard wrote for various hotels.

Arrangement: Material is in arranged alphabetically and dates are arranged chronologically.

Title/Description	Containers	
Branding Iron Review, 1949-1964 and undated		
, 1949-1950	box 18	folder 1
Las Vegas Press Club, 1949	box 18	folder 2

, 1952	box 18	folder 3
, 1953	box 18	folder 4
, 1955	box 18	folder 5
, 1956	box 19	folder 1
, 1956, #2	box 19	folder 2
, 1958	box 19	folder 3
, 1962-1964	box 19	folder 5
, 1961	box 19	folder 4
Las Vegas Hotel Press Release and Promotional Files, undated		
Aladdin	box 20	folder 1
Aladdin, #2	box 20	folder 2
Arizona Charlie's	box 20	folder 3
Bally's	box 20	folder 4
Bally's, #2	box 20	folder 5
Bally's, #3	box 21	folder 1
Bally's, #4	box 21	folder 2
Bally's, #5	box 21	folder 3
Bally's, #6	box 21	folder 4
Bally's, #7	box 21	folder 5
Bonanza	box 21	folder 5
Boulder Station	box 22	folder 1
Caesar's Palace	box 22	folder 2
Caesar's Palace	box 22	folder 3
Caesar's Palace	box 22	folder 4
Caesar's Palace	box 23	folder 1
Caesar's Palace	box 23	folder 2
California Hotel	box 23	folder 3
Circus Circus	box 23	folder 4
Circus Circus	box 23	folder 5
Desert Inn	box 24	folder 1
Desert Inn	box 25	folder 1
Desert Inn	box 26	folder 1

Debbie Reynolds	box 27	folder 1
Del Webb International	box 27	folder 2
Dunes	box 27	folder 3
Dunes, #2	box 27	folder 4
Excalibur	box 27	folder 5
Flamingo	box 27	folder 6
Flamingo, #2	box 27	folder 7
Flamingo, #3	box 27	folder 8
Four Queens	box 27	folder 9
Fremont	box 27	folder 10
Frontier	box 27	folder 11
Golden Nugget	box 28	folder 1
Hacienda	box 28	folder 2
Hank Henry	box 28	folder 3
Hank Henry, #2	box 28	folder 4
Happy Birthday Las Vegas	box 28	folder 5
Harrah's	box 28	folder 6
Hotel Continental	box 28	folder 7
International	box 28	folder 8
Imperial Palace	box 28	folder 9
King 8	box 28	folder 10
Lady Luck	box 28	folder 11
Landmark Hotel	box 28	folder 12
Las Vegas Hilton	box 28	folder 13
Luxor	box 28	folder 14
Marina	box 28	folder 15
Maxim		

	box 28	folder 16
MGM Grand	box 29	folder 1
Miscellaneous, single	box 29	folder 2
Nevada Palace	box 29	folder 3
Paddlewheel	box 29	folder 4
Palomino	box 29	folder 5
Palace Station	box 29	folder 6
Paris	box 29	folder 7
Ramada	box 30	folder 1
Red Cross Drive, 1957	box 30	folder 2
Rio	box 30	folder 3
Riverside Resort, Laughlin, NV	box 30	folder 4
Riviera	box 30	folder 5
Riviera, #2	box 30	folder 6
Riviera, #3	box 30	folder 7
Riviera, #4	box 31	folder 1
Riviera, #5	box 31	folder 2
Riviera, #6	box 31	folder 3
Riviera, #7	box 31	folder 4
Riviera, #8	box 31	folder 5
Riviera, #9	box 32	folder 1
Riviera, #10	box 32	folder 2
Royal Inn	box 32	folder 3
Sahara	box 32	folder 4
Sahara, #2	box 32	folder 5
Sam's Town	box 32	folder 6
Sands	box 33	folder 1
Sands, #2	box 33	folder 2
Sands, #3	box 33	folder 3
San Remo	box 33	folder 4
Santa Fe	box 33	folder 5
Showboat	box 33	folder 6

Silverbird	box 33	folder 7
Silver City	box 33	folder 8
Silver Slipper	box 33	folder 9
Stardust	box 33	folder 10
Stratosphere	box 33	folder 11
Sunset Station	box 34	folder 1
Texas Station	box 34	folder 2
Thunderbird	box 34	folder 3
Tropicana	box 34	folder 4
Tropicana, #2	box 34	folder 5
Tropicana, #3	box 34	folder 6
Union Plaza	box 35	folder 1
UNLV	box 35	folder 2
UNLV, #2	box 35	folder 3
UNLV, #3	box 35	folder 4
UNLV, #4	box 35	folder 5
Vegas World	box 35	folder 6
Las Vegas News Bureau	box 36	folder 1
Las Vegas News Bureau	box 37	folder 1

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Series 4: Interviews and Writings, 1949-1994

Physical Description: (15 boxes)

Scope and Contents Note: Materials (1949-1994) contain interviews conducted by Willard, memo books, invitations, skits and routines, and drafts of a television special concept titled *Las Vegas Dreams*.

Arrangement: Material remains in original order.

Title/Description	Containers	
Typed interview transcripts		
Barbutti, Pete, undated	box 38	folder 1
Bartel, Jose, 1978	box 38	folder 2
Cannes Film Festival, undated	box 38	folder 3
Cohen, Burton, 1982	box 38	folder 4

Cooper, Alice, undated	box 38	folder 5
Ellington, Duke, undated	box 38	folder 6
Grant, Allen, undated	box 38	folder 7
Gregory, Matt, undated	box 38	folder 8
Hannifin, Phil, undated	box 38	folder 9
Harkins, Ken, 1976	box 38	folder 10
Hirsch, Bob, 1983	box 38	folder 11
Kutash, Jeff, 1986	box 38	folder 12
Lane, Dick, undated	box 38	folder 13
Lewin, Henry, 1983	box 38	folder 14
McKenna, Dave, 1982	box 38	folder 15
Stevens, Maury, undated	box 38	folder 16
Torres, Ed, dated	box 38	folder 17
Routines		
Incomplete, undated	box 38	folder 18
Carter, Jack, undated	box 38	folder 19
Collins, Jerry, undated	box 38	folder 20
Memo Books, 1967 – 1974	box 39	folder 1
Memo Books, 1975 –1979	box 39	folder 2
Memo Books, 1981 – 1988	box 39	folder 3
Articles, 1973-1987	box 40	folder 1
Articles, 1983-1987	box 40	folder 2
"Las Vegas Strip" columns for the Review Journal, 1987	box 40	folder 3
Articles, 1973-1987	box 41	folder 1
Articles, 1973-1987	box 41	folder 2
Articles, 1979	box 41	folder 3

Skits		
Silver Slipper, #1, 1953	box 42	folder 1
Silver Slipper, #2, 1953	box 42	folder 2
Silver Slipper, #1, 1954	box 42	folder 3
Silver Slipper, #2, 1954	box 42	folder 4
Silver Slipper, #3, 1954	box 43	folder 1
Silver Slipper, #4, 1954	box 43	folder 2
Silver Slipper, #1, 1955	box 43	folder 3
Silver Slipper, #2, 1955	box 43	folder 4
America's Laffingest Couple, undated	box 44	folder 1
Arts and Farces, undated	box 44	folder 2
Blithe Spirit, undated	box 44	folder 3
Cantata, Las Vegas Memorial, 1949	box 44	folder 5
The Brick Wall, undated	box 44	folder 4
A Christmas Carol, undated	box 44	folder 6
The Main Scrutiny: a modern mortality play, undated	box 44	folder 7
The Meadows Playhouse, news releases, undated	box 44	folder 8
"Meet Me in Las Vegas," Sands Hotel and Casino, 1956	box 44	folder 9
My Fair Lady, undated	box 44	folder 10
The Real Inspector Hound, undated	box 44	folder 11
The Real Inspector Hound, negatives, undated	box 44	folder 12
This Must be the Place, undated	box 44	folder 13
The Walter Winchell Las Vegas Saga, 1994	box 44	folder 14
Jokes, undated	box 45	folder 1
Jokes, undated	box 46	folder 1
The Days of Old, The Days of Gold, TV concept, undated	box 47	folder 1
The Feminine View, TV8 script, undated	box 47	folder 2
KORK master music list, 1987	box 47	folder 3
KRAM Radio advertisements, 1958	box 47	folder 4

KRGN Radio, correspondence, 1968	box 47	folder 5
KRGN Radio program scripts, 1949-1956	box 47	folder 6
KUUV TV5, schedule changes, 1990	box 47	folder 7
Las Vegas, Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow, TV Special concept	box 47	folder 8
Las Vegas Television Productions, 1970s	box 47	folder 9
Sunday Concert Records via FM Radio, undated	box 47	folder 10
Supin, Charles: KLAS entertainment critic, 1977	box 47	folder 11
Television series concepts, 1977-1978	box 47	folder 12
Las Vegas Dreams		
Correspondence, 1975-1979	box 48	folder 1
First draft #1, 1975	box 48	folder 2
First draft #2, 1975	box 48	folder 3
Legal papers, 1975 August	box 48	folder 4
Manuscript, undated	box 48	folder 5
Cassette tapes of basic names, undated Physical Description: 14 Audio Cassettes	box 48	folder 6
Name list	box 49	folder 1
Hustlers	box 49	folder 2
Romance	box 49	folder 3
Romancers	box 49	folder 4
Winners	box 49	folder 5
Losers	box 49	folder 6
Violence	box 49	folder 7
Virtue	box 49	folder 8
Programs, undated	box 50	folder 1
Programs, undated	box 50	folder 2
Invitations, Aladdin Hotel, 1976	box 51	folder 1
Invitations Caesars Palace, 1974	box 51	folder 2
Invitations Desert Inn, 1952 and undated	box 51	folder 3
Invitations Dunes, 1955, 1969	box 51	folder 4
Invitations: Silverbird, undated	box 51	folder 5

Invitations to various Las Vegas events, 1959-1997 and undated	box 51	folder 6
Plaque, section of wood from the Sands showroom, 1981	box 51	
Reel to reel tapes, undated Physical Description: 4 Reels	box 52	folder 1
Las Vegas bullfights, 1965 February 21	box 52	
Las Vegas Beautification, undated Physical Description: 2 Reels	box 52	
ARF Productions present Robbie, undated	box 52	

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