

TITLE: Omer T. McCoon Collection

DATE RANGE: 1900-2012

CALL NUMBER: Y-MS 48

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.5 linear feet (4 boxes)

PROVENANCE: Donated by Verda McCain, Omer McCoon's granddaughter in 2003 and 2015

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CREDIT LINE: Omer T. McCoon Collection, Y-MS 48, Arizona Historical Society- Rio Colorado Division

PROCESSED BY: Benjamin Findley, July 2014 and Linda Whitaker, March 2016

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Omer Trent (O.T.) McCoon was born at Fort Scott, Kansas in 1879. The family moved to Oregon where his father George Henry McCoon sold Singer Sewing Machines. Omer and his brother Otis became involved in construction and real estate in Fresno, California. Otis went on to specialize in construction and urban development in the San Francisco area. O.T. became head of the Fresno Realty Syndicate. He reportedly sold over 200,000 acres of grape and fig land before moving his family to Yuma, Arizona in 1916 where he envisioned huge opportunities for agricultural growth.

O.T. became known as "On Time" McCoon for his punctuality and for his reputation as a tireless promoter of the All American Canal, the Yuma Project, Wellton-Mohawk Water Conservation District, the Yuma-Phoenix Highway, and agriculture generally. He is credited with influencing the Southern Pacific Railroad to build a Phoenix branch. He served on every major irrigation district board, provided leadership for many civic organizations and attracted investors outside of Yuma when no Yuma banker would lend him money for farm land.

He was fearless, committed and innovative. He was the first to see the potential of the airplane to promote sales and in 1919 flew prospective investors into the Gila Valley for property tours. He championed crop experimentation and invested his own money in grapes, alfalfa and citrus. He loved fine cars and appreciated good horses, logging thousands of miles surveying desert terrain. He was well-dressed, smoked big cigars and wore elk's teeth on his pocket watch chain – evident in his collection of photos.

O.T. married Bertha Hutchings on his 22nd birthday in 1900. They had two children Verda and Omer T. "Buddy" McCoon Jr. both of whom attended Yuma Union High School. Verda died of pneumonia in 1929, leaving behind a husband Lee Donkersley and baby daughter Verda Rae. Buddy McCoon died two months later of cerebral meningitis at age 14. Verda Rae lived with her grandparents O.T. and Bertha McCoon after her father died in a tanker truck accident. Verda Rae married Don McCain, a Yuma native in 1947. All are now buried in the Yuma Pioneer Cemetery.

Despite personal setbacks and the Great Depression, On Time McCoon saw the future. In 1936, he was quoted in the *San Diego Union*: “Picture in your mind an empire with a potential population of 100,000 people producing out-of-season crops for Christmas and grapefruit at the rate of 1,000 boxes per acre...”

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Arranged in four series: **Series I: General** – reflects what little remains of the McCoon business, legal and personal records including a poignant letter from son Buddy to his father, O.T. **Series II: Publications** – well-thumbed studies and legal references used by O.T. McCoon for land sales. **Series III: Photographs** – many commissioned by or taken by O.T. McCoon and used for agriculture and irrigation promotional materials. Wife Bertha, daughter Verda and son “Buddy” often featured in groves and fields. Images not found in albums are grouped by topic. **Series IV: News Clippings** – photocopied from various albums due to poor condition of originals. Note that Oversized includes 3 albums; memorabilia (address books, notebook, bible); 3 large photos, and 2 maps. For additional maps, see map case drawers.

CONTAINER LIST:

Box	Folder	Title	Dates
1	1	General: Biographical (includes McCoon and Donkersley family trees) See also George Washington Crane biographical file	1921-1935, 2012, n.d.
	2	General: Correspondence (personal and business)	1911-1947
	3	General: Gila Valley Project (maps, brochures, promotional material)	1930s
	4	General: Receipts, Stationary	1930s-1957
	5	Publications: <i>Arizona Land Irrigable from the Colorado River</i>	1922-1923
	6	Publications: <i>Entries and Proofs under the Desert Land Laws</i>	1916
	7	Publications: <i>Soil Surveys of Middle Gila Valley and Yuma-Wellton Area</i>	1920, n.d.
	8	Publications: <i>The Lower Gila Region, Arizona</i>	1923
	10	Photographs: “Bertha McCoon Album” (mostly unidentified, disassembled due to poor condition of album; in original page order)	1890s-1920s
	11	Photographs: Family/Group	1900-1920s
	2	1	Photographs: Irrigation and Agriculture
2		Photographs: McCain and Donkersley 1 of 2	1900s-circa 2012
3		Photographs: McCain and Donkersley 2 of 2	1904-2011
4		Photographs: Omer Trent McCoon Jr. ”Buddy”	circa 1915-1929
5		Photographs: O.T. McCoon (business, field trips, recreation)	
6		Photographs: “O.T. McCoon Album” (intact)	1920s-1930s
3	1	Photographs: “O.T. McCoon Album” (found loose in a deteriorating album, original order unknown)	1920s-1930s
	2	Photographs: O.T. McCoon and Horses	1920s
	3	Photographs: Verda McCoon	1920s

	4	Photographs: Unidentified	n.d.
	5	News Clippings: Photocopies (from albums)	1912-1923
	6	News Clippings: Photocopies (from albums)	1925-1929
	7	News Clippings: Photocopies (from albums)	1930-1936
	8	News Clippings: Photocopies (from albums)	1942-1962
	9	News Clippings: Photocopies (from albums)	n.d.
4	OV	Oversized: Albums, Memorabilia, Maps, Photos	1900s-1930s
Map drawer	OV	Oversized: Maps	