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Guide to the Esther Shephard Papers

Silke Higgins
SJSU Library Special Collections & Archives
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library
San José State University
One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0028
Phone: (408) 808-2062
Fax: (408) 808-2063
Email: special.collections@sjsu.edu
URL: http://www.sjlibrary.org/research/special/special_coll/
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Guide to the Esther Shephard Papers

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Finding aid funded by the generous support of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

Processed by:
Silke Higgins
Date Completed:
2009
Encoded by:
Silke Higgins

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Esther Shephard Papers

Dates: 1925-1975

Bulk Dates: 1945-1968

Collection number: MSS-2009-11-01

Creator: Shephard, Esther, 1891-1975

Collection Size: 5 boxes, 5.42 linear feet

Repository: San José State University. Library.

San José, California 95192-0028

Abstract: The Esther Shephard Papers, 1925-1975 (bulk 1945-1968) provide insight into the personal and professional life of writer, poet, and San José State University English professor Esther Shephard. The records consist of journals, diaries, travelogues, photographs, literary manuscripts, poetry, correspondence, newspaper clippings, sheet music, and copies of Shephard's published books, as well as a small collection of Chinese woodcut blocks. This collection is arranged into four series: Series I. Personal Materials, 1925-1975 (bulk 1962-1975); Series II. Professional Materials, 1944-1971; Series III. Published Materials, 1933-1972; and Series IV. Realia, undated.

Physical location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

The collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Esther Shephard Papers, MSS-2009-11-01, San José State University Library Special Collections & Archives.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Silke Higgins. Finding aid EAD encoded by Silke Higgins. Reviewed by Danelle Moon and Erin Louthen.

Project Information

This finding aid was created as part of the Survey and Cataloging Project, a two-year San José State University Library grant project funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The project began in 2008. The Project Director is Danelle Moon. The Project Archivist is Erin Louthen.

Organizational History

In 1857 the San Francisco Board of Education established Minns' Evening Normal School for current and prospective teachers in the city. Named after its principal, George W. Minns, the institution was formally established as the first California State Normal School by the State Legislature in 1862. A decade later, the Legislature voted to move the Normal School to San José, and the school relocated to its new home on Washington Square prior to the fall term of 1872. After a fire destroyed the Normal School building in 1880, the Legislature authorized $200,000 to construct a new building on the same site. Completed in 1881, the building was commonly referred to as the Second State Normal School. After several names and curriculum changes, Minns' Normal School is now San José State University, offering more than 134 bachelor's and master's degrees with 110 concentrations, and is recognized as one of the top public universities granting such degrees in the West.

Esther Shephard, author, professor of literature, and literary critic, was born Esther Maria Lofstrand in 1891. She began her career as a high school teacher in Belgrade, Montana. However, only a short time later, after the loss of her first husband, Richard T. Shepherd, she moved and enrolled at the University of Washington where she earned her B.A. in 1920, followed by an M.A. in 1921 and a Ph.D. in 1938. In 1921, Esther married C. Ellis Shephard and in the same year her master's thesis, *Frontier Literature*, was published. A subsequent collection of West Coast logging camp stories, retold by Shephard in *Paul Bunyan*, was self-published in 1924 and republished in 1941 with illustrations by Rockwell Kent. Starting in the early 1930s, Shephard shifted her focus from composing poems to playwriting and the literary criticism of Walt Whitman's work, the latter of which culminated in her Ph.D. dissertation, *Walt Whitman's Pose*, published in 1938. In 1939, Shephard obtained her most important academic appointment at the English Department of San José State University, where she taught for the next twenty years. During that time her most significant achievement was the retelling of the ancient Chinese legend, *The Cowherd and the Sky Maiden*, which was published in 1950 and staged as an opera at the University of Washington in 1952. Her primary focus remained on Walt Whitman, and resulted in the publication of several papers about Whitman's works during her years at the university. She died in 1975 at the age of eighty-four.

Bibliography

Gilbert, Benjamin F., and Burdick, Charles. *Washington Square, 1857-1979: The History of San José State University*. San José, California: San José State University, 1980.

San José State University. About SJSU. http://www.sjsu.edu/about_sjsu/

University of Washington Special Collections. Preliminary Guide to the Esther Shephard Papers 1852-1972. http://www.lib.washington.edu/specialcoll/findaids/docs/papersrecords/ShephardEsther0994.xml

Walsh, James P. *San José State University: An Interpretive History, 1950-2000*. San José, California: San José State University, 2003.

Related Material

San José State University Archives Photograph Collection, MSS-2006-05-01, San José State University Library Special Collections and Archives.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Esther Shephard Papers, 1925-1975 (bulk 1945-1968) provide insight into the personal and professional life of writer, poet, and San José State University English professor Esther Shephard. The records consist of journals, diaries, travelogues, photographs, literary manuscripts, poetry, correspondence, newspaper clippings, sheet music, and copies of Shephard's published books, as well as a small collection of Chinese woodcut blocks.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged into four series: Series I. Personal Materials, 1925-1975 (bulk 1962-1975); Series II. Professional Materials, 1944-1971; Series III. Published Materials, 1933-1972; and Series IV. Realia, undated.

Subject Headings

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Shephard, Esther.

San Jose State University -- English Dept. -- History.

San Jose State Teachers College -- History.

San Jose State College -- History.

California State University, San Jose -- History.

San Jose State University -- History.

Education, Higher -- California -- San Jose.

College teachers -- California -- San Jose.

Authors, American -- California -- San Jose.

Travel

Literature

Poetry

Series I: **Personal Materials 1925-1975 (bulk 1962-1975)**

Physical Description: 1 box

Series Scope and Content Summary

The materials in this series document the personal and family life of Esther Shephard. Focused primarily on her travels, Shephard's thoughts, ideas, and experiences are collected in a series of handwritten journals, which are accompanied by photographs and interspersed with correspondence. Mrs. Shephard's love for travel is evidenced in her personal diaries, travelogues, and photographs taken while visiting Europe, the Far East, and the Australian Continent.

Arrangement

This series is arranged chronologically.

Box: 1 **Journals and Diaries 1925-1975**

Series II: **Professional Materials 1944-1971**

Physical Description: 2 boxes

Series Scope and Content Summary

The materials in this series document the work of Esther Shephard. It is comprised of handwritten and typed documents pertaining to Shephard's extensive research for her poems, plays, and books over a 20-year period. This series also includes a selection of pages from the Library of Congress' extensive collection of Walt Whitman's papers, as well as one roll of microfilm from the British Library's Printed Book Department containing Edward Grant's *Gracae Linguae Spicilegium* (first published in 1575).

Arrangement

This series is arranged by topic.

Box: 2 **Research Materials, Notes, and Drafts 1945-1971**

Box: 3 **Journals, Correspondence, and Newspaper Clippings 1944-1971**

Series III: **Published Materials 1933-1972**

Physical Description: 2 boxes

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series is comprised of one volume each of Esther Shephard's published books, *Paul Bunyan* (1933), *The Thread of Ariadne - Walt Whitman as Poet* (1936), *Walt Whitman's Pose* (1938), *The Cowherd and the Skymaiden* (1950), *An Oriental Tale and a Romantic Poet* (1967), and the critical commentary, *A Fact Which Should Have Been Included in Walt Whitman's Earliest Known Notebook* (1972). This series also includes a number of scholarly publications containing articles and papers written by Esther Shephard.

Box 4 **Published Works 1933-1972**

Series IV: **Realia, undated**

Physical Description: 1 box

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series is comprised of a small collection of Chinese woodcut blocks acquired by Esther Shephard during her travels.

Box: 5 **Chinese Woodcut Blocks**