

Guide to the John Wittwer Collection on Agriculture in Nevada

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Table of Contents

Summary Information	. 3
Biographical Note	. 4
Scope and Contents Note	. 5
Arrangement	. 5
Administrative Information	. 6
Related Materials	. 6
Names and Subjects	. 7
Collection Inventory	. 7
Series I. University of Nevada Annual Agricultural Reports	. 7
Series II: University of Nevada Farm Bureau Annual Reports	15
Series III: County Agent Projects	
Series IV: Special Projects, Southern Nevada	18
Series V: Agricultural Experiment Station, Southern Nevada	19
Series VI: Publications and Artwork	20

Summary Information

Repository: University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special

Collections and Archives.

Creator: Wittwer, John, 1880-1977

Title: John Wittwer Collection on Agriculture in Nevada

ID: MS-00181

Date [inclusive]: 1898 to 1972 **Date [bulk]:** 1929 to 1955

Physical 4.71 Cubic Feet (7 boxes and 1 flat file)

Description:

Physical 4.00 Linear Feet

Description:

Language of the English

Material:

Abstract: The John Wittwer Collection on Agriculture in Nevada

(1898-1972) contains the professional papers and records of John Wittwer in his capacity as an Agricultural Extension agent for the University of Nevada from 1921 to 1954. The records are primarily annual reports containing text, photographs, newspaper clippings, and charts that provide a rich chronicle of the conditions of agriculture and ranching in southern Nevada from 1898 to 1972, with the bulk of the material dating from 1929 to 1955. These conditions span water issues, such as flood control and irrigation, to the general difficulties of sustaining agriculture and viable food production in a desert environment. The reports come from the Agricultural Experiment Stations in Clark and Lincoln counties and most contain both a statistical report and a

narrative summary.

Preferred Citation

John Wittwer Collection on Agriculture in Nevada, 1898-1972. MS-00181. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Las Vegas, Nevada. Las Vegas, Nevada.

[^] Return to Table of Contents

Biographical Note

John Wittwer was employed as the District Agricultural Agent for the University of Nevada Extension project from 1921-1954 in the area around the Moapa and Virgin Valleys in Clark County, Nevada. Born on November 21, 1880, Wittwer came to southern Nevada in 1921 from Uintah County, Utah where he had been an agricultural county agent for five years. Wittwer had previously worked as a teacher in Utah; this experience would prove invaluable in his work to educate farmers and promote new agricultural and conservation programs in southern Nevada's rural communities. In 1908, Wittwer married Anna Syphus, daughter of a prominent local Mormon family, and had two daughters and two sons. She died from influenza in 1922, one year after relocating to Nevada. Wittwer would marry his second wife, Della Parley, in 1935.

According to Wittwer, one pressing need in southern Nevada was to find a way to enhance methods of soil improvement and conservation. Wittwer's first responsibility as an agent was to establish an experiment station in cooperation with the U. S. Bureau of Soils and the University of Nevada. Experiment stations were initially charged with finding solutions for depleted soils and improving the health of farm animals. Thereafter, Wittwer was involved with other rural experiment station projects that were put into place to provide educational assistance to farmers in gardening, livestock, farm and range, community economics, community welfare, water and sanitation.

Wittwer identified water issues such as water storage, drainage, and flood control as the second major set of problems that plagued southern Nevada. It would take decades of agent recommendations and government planning to overcome all of the monumental water problems facing southwestern states in this regard. Dam projects would take priority in the Southwest during the 1930s in the Roosevelt years with Wittwer helping to organize and set up large camps for two hundred of the Civilian Conservation Corps working on Hoover Dam. As a part of this enormous project, he also assisted in establishing another ten camps of operations for flood control.

Three additional areas within Wittwer's agricultural responsibilities were the development of the dairy industry, vegetable production and marketing, and the 4-H Clubs in southern Nevada. The first two, the dairy industry and vegetable production and marketing development, came about as a result of the construction of Boulder (later Hoover) Dam and the effects of the Great Depression. After Congress passed the Boulder Dam Bill in 1929, Las Vegas and Boulder City became the base of operations for construction of the Dam and housed thousands of workers. As food supplies and milk were critical for feeding workers, new methods for the increased development of dairy herds and vegetable production were explored and pursued. Wittwer's other major responsibility was the 4-H Clubs (Head, Heart, Hand, and Health). In his memoirs, Wittwer warmly addresses his pride in the accomplishments and growth of 4-H, and in the citizenship found among the boys and girls of isolated desert communities.

John Wittwer was also an accomplished illustrator and draughtsman, and many of his reports include hand-drawn maps and surveys of the Moapa and Virgin Valleys. After retiring at age

seventy-one, Wittwer pursued art and higher education at universities throughout the west. He died on August 20, 1977.

^ Return to Table of Contents

Scope and Contents Note

The John Wittwer Collection on Agriculture in Nevada (1898-1972) contains the professional papers and records of John Wittwer in his capacity as an Agricultural Extension agent for the University of Nevada from 1921 to 1954. The records are primarily annual reports containing text, photographs, newspaper clippings, and charts that provide a rich chronicle of the conditions of agriculture and ranching in southern Nevada from 1898 to 1972, with the bulk of the material dating from 1929 to 1955. These conditions span water issues, such as flood control and irrigation, to the general difficulties of sustaining agriculture and viable food production in a desert environment. The reports come from the Agricultural Experiment Stations in Clark and Lincoln counties and most contain both a statistical report and a narrative summary. There is also documentation regarding Wittwer's work as a Clark County agent and that of other Nevada County Agents. Other material in the collection includes correspondence on various agricultural programs administered by Wittwer, and project files detailing progress made on rural farming concerns and developments such as nutrition, home health and sanitation, home gardening, home improvement, community activities and the 4-H club.

^ Return to Table of Contents

Arrangement

These records are organized into six series:

Series I. University of Nevada Annual Agricultural Reports, 1922-1966;

Series II. University of Nevada Farm Bureau Annual Report, 1925-1929;

Series III. University of Nevada County Agent Projects Annual Reports, 1927-1942;

Series IV. Special Projects, Southern Nevada, 1915-1950;

Series V. Agricultural Experiment Station Reports, Southern Nevada, 1898-1972;

Series VI. Artwork and Publications, 1931-1965.

Administrative Information

Access Note

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

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Acquisition Note

Materials were donated in 1976 by Ferren Bunker; accession numbers T-101, 76-233, 76-173, and 78-851.

Processing Note

In 2002, materials were processed by JoAnn Spair. In 2018, as part of an archival backlog elimination project, Sarah revised the collection description to bring it into compliance with current professional standards. In 2022, Sarah Jones and Emily Lapworth reprocessed the collection to prepare for digitization.

^ Return to Table of Contents

Related Materials

Related Collections

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

John Hyram Wittwer oral history interview, 1976 April 01. OH-02259. [Cite format consulted: Audio recording or Transcript.] Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada.

John Wittwer oral history interview, 1972 May 17. OH-02005. [Cite format consulted: Audio recording or Transcript.] Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Syphus-Bunker Papers, 1891-1994. MS-00169. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

William E. Ferron Family Papers, 1917-1976. MS-00061. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Elbert Edwards Papers, 1896-1988. MS-00311. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

^ Return to Table of Contents

Names and Subjects

- Ranch life -- Nevada -- Clark County -- History
- Agriculture -- Research -- United States
- Agricultural extension work -- Nevada
- Agricultural experiment stations
- University of Nevada. Agricultural Extension Division
- 4-H Youth Development Program (U.S.)

Collection Inventory

Contain	ers
box 01	folder 01
box 01	folder 02
box 01	folder 03
box 01	folder 03
box 01	folder 04
box 01	folder 04
box 01	folder 05
	box 01 box 01 box 01 box 01

Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1936 November 01 to 1937 October 31 (man001193)

	box 01	folder 05
University of Nevada Agricultural Extension Division, Clark County, Nevada Annual Report, 1926 November 01 to 1937 February 28 (man001194)	box 01	folder 05
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1937 November 01 to 1938 October 31 (man001195)	box 01	folder 06
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1938 November 01 to 1939 October 31 (man001196)	box 01	folder 06
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1938 November 01 to 1939 October 31 (man001197)	box 01	folder 07
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1939 November 01 to 1940 October 31 (man001198)	box 01	folder 07
Lincoln County, Nevada Historical Review and Appraisal of Extension Work, 1939 December 20 (man001199)	box 01	folder 08
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1939 November 01 to 1940 October 31 (man001200)	box 01	folder 08
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1939 November 01 to 1940 October 31 (man001201)	box 01	folder 08
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1941 November 01 to 1942 October 31 (man001202)	box 01	folder 09
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1940 October 30 to 1941 November 01 (man001203)	box 01	folder 09
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1941 November 01 to 1942 October 31 (man001204)	box 01	folder 10
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1942 November 01 to 1943 October 31 (man001205)	box 01	folder 10
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1942 November 01 to 1943 October 31 (man001206)	box 01	folder 11
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1943 November 01 to 1944 October 31 (man001207)	box 01	folder 11
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1943 November 01 to 1944 October 31 (man001208)	box 01	folder 12
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1943 November 01 to 1944 October 31 (man001209)	box 01	folder 12

Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1944 November 01 to 1945 October 31 (man001210)	box 01	folder 13
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report (man001211)	box 01	folder 14
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1945 October 31 to 1946 November 01 (man001212)	box 01	folder 14
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1946 November 01 to 1947 October 31 (man001213)	box 01	folder 14
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1945 December 28 to 1946 November 01 (man001214)	box 01	folder 14
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1946 November 01 to 1947 October 31 (man001300)	box 02	folder 01
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1946 November 01 to 1947 October 31 (man001301)	box 02	folder 01
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1946 November 01 to 1947 October 31 (man001302)	box 02	folder 01
General 4H program and livestock projects report, 1947 (man001303)	box 02	folder 01
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1946 November 01 to 1947 October 31 (man001304)	box 02	folder 01
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1947 November 01 to 1948 October 31 (man001305)	box 02	folder 02
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1947 November 01 to 1948 October 31 (man001306)	box 02	folder 02
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1948 September 01 to 1948 October 31 (man001307)	box 02	folder 02
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1948 November 01 to 1949 October 31 (man001308)	box 02	folder 03
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1948 November 01 to 1949 October 31 (man001309)	box 02	folder 03
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1948 November 01 to 1949 October 31 (man001310)	box 02	folder 03
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1949 November 01 to 1950 October 31 (man001311)	box 02	folder 04
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report, 1950 November 01 to 1951 October 31 (man001312)	box 02	folder 04

Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark Coun Extension Workers, 1949 November 01 to 1950 Oc (man001313)	, ·	folder 04
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Acti Narrative Report, 1949 November 01 to 1950 Octo		folder 04
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark Coun Extension Workers, 1950 November 01 to 1951 Oc (man001315)		folder 05
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Acti Narrative Report, 1950 November 01 to 1951 Octo		folder 05
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark Coun Extension Workers, 1951 November 01 to 1952 Oc (man001317)		folder 06
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Acti Narrative Report, 1951 November 01 to 1952 Octo		folder 06
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Acti Narrative Report, 1952 April 01 to 1952 October 3		folder 06
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark Coun Extension Workers, 1952 November 01 to 1953 Oc (man001320)		folder 07
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Acti Narrative Report, 1952 November 01 to 1953 Octo		folder 07
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Wor Report, 1952 November 01 to 1953 October 31 (ma		folder 07
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark Coun Extension Workers, 1953 November 01 to 1954 Oc (man001323)	, ·	folder 08
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Wor Report, 1953 November 01 to 1954 October 31 (ma		folder 08
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Wor Report, 1953 November 01 to 1954 October 31 (ma		folder 08
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Wor Report, 1954 November 01 to 1955 October 31 (ma		folder 09
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Wor Report, 1955 July 01 to 1955 October 31 (man0013		folder 09
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Wor Report, 1954 November 01 to 1955 October 31 (ma		folder 09
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Wor Report, 1955 September 01 to 1955 October 31 (ma		folder 09
Nevada Home Agent Work Annual Report, 1955 A October 31 (man001330)	ugust 01 to 1955 box 02	folder 09

Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1954 November 01 to 1955 October 31 (man001331)	box 02	folder 09
Agricultural Extension Work Combined Annual Narrative Report for Clark County, Pahrump Valley, and Nye County, Nevada, 1955 November 01 to 1956 October 31 (man001332)	box 02	folder 10
Agricultural Extension Work Combined Annual Narrative Report for Clark County, Pahrump Valley, and Nye County, Nevada, 1956 November 01 to 1957 October 31 (man001333)	box 02	folder 10
Clark County, Nevada Extension Service Annual Plan of Work, 1957 (man001334)	box 02	folder 10
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Division Annual Narrative Report, 1955 November 01 to 1956 October 31 (man001335)	box 02	folder 10
Nevada Home Agent Work Annual Report, 1955 November 01 to 1956 October 31 (man001336)	box 02	folder 10
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Workers, 1955 November 01 to 1956 October 31 (man001337)	box 02	folder 10
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Work Annual Narrative Report, 1956 November 01 to 1957 October 31 (man001440)	box 03	folder 01
Clark County, Nevada Agricultural Extension Work Combined Annual Narrative Report, 1956 November 01 to 1957 October 31 (man001441)	box 03	folder 01
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1956 November 01 to 1957 October 31 (man001442)	box 03	folder 01
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1956 November 01 to 1957 October 31 (man001443)	box 03	folder 02
Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1957 (man001444)	box 03	folder 02
Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1956 October 01 to 1958 October 31 (man001445)	box 03	folder 02
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1957 November 01 to 1958 October 31 (man001446)	box 03	folder 02
Letters to Clark County, Nevada extension agents about reports, 1957 (man001447)	box 03	folder 02
Clark County, Nevada Extension Service Annual Plan of Work, 1958 (man001448)	box 03	folder 03
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1957 November 01 to 1958 October 31 (man001449)	box 03	folder 03
Clark County, Nevada Extension Service Annual Plan of Work, 1959 (man001450)	box 03	folder 04
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1958 November 01 to 1959 October 31 (man001451)	box 03	folder 04

Clark County, Nevada Extension Service Annual Plan of Work, 1960 (man001452)	box 03	folder 05
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1959 November 01 to 1960 October 31 (man001453)	box 03	folder 05
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1960 November 01 to 1961 October 31 (man001454)	box 03	folder 06
Clark County, Nevada Extension Service Annual Plan of Work, 1961 (man001455)	box 03	folder 06
Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents Annual Narrative Report, 1966 January 01 to 1966 December 31 (man001456)	box 03	folder 07
Combined Counties, 1923 to 1960		
Extension Agent Annual Report for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1923 (man001457)	box 03	folder 08
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1922 December 01 to 1923 November 30 (man001458)	box 03	folder 08
Clark County, Nevada Extension Agent Annual Narrative Report, 1923 December 01 to 1924 October 31 (man001459)	box 03	folder 09
Lincoln County, Nevada Extension Agent Annual Narrative Report, 1923 to 1924 (man001460)	box 03	folder 09
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1923 to 1924 (man001461)	box 03	folder 09
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1923 to 1924 (man001462)	box 03	folder 10
Extension Agent Annual Report for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1924 (man001463)	box 03	folder 10
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1924 to 1925 (man001464)	box 03	folder 11
Clark County, Nevada Extension Agent Annual Narrative Report, 1924 to 1925 (man001465)	box 03	folder 11
Lincoln County, Nevada Extension Agent Annual Narrative Report, 1924 to 1925 (man001466)	box 03	folder 11
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1924 to 1925 (man001467)	box 03	folder 12
Extension Agent Annual Report for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1925 (man001468)	box 03	folder 12
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1925 to 1926 (man001469)	box 03	folder 13
Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1925 to 1926 (man001470)	box 03	folder 13

Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1925 November 01 to 1926 October 31 (man001471)	box 03	folder 14
District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Pershing, Lyon, Eureka, Lander, White Pine, Lincoln, and Clark Counties, Nevada, 1926 to 1927 (man001472)	box 03	folder 15
District Extension Agent Final Report for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1927 March 31 (man001473)	box 03	folder 16
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1926 November 01 to 1927 March 31 (man001474)	box 03	folder 16
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1926 November 01 to 1927 November 30 (man001475)	box 04	folder 01
District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1926 November 01 to 1927 November 30 (man001476)	box 04	folder 01
District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1927 December 01 to 1928 October 31 (man001477)	box 04	folder 02
District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1928 (man001478)	box 04	folder 02
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1928 August 15 to 1928 October 01 (man001479)	box 04	folder 02
District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1928 November 01 to 1929 October 31 (man001480)	box 04	folder 03
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1928 November 01 to 1929 October 31 (man001481)	box 04	folder 03
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1928 August 15 to 1930 November 01 (man001482)	box 04	folder 04
Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1929 November 01 to 1930 October 31 (man001483)	box 04	folder 04
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1930 October 31 to 1931 November 01 (man001484)	box 04	folder 05
District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1931 November 01 to 1932 October 31 (man001485)	box 04	folder 05
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1931 December 01 to 1932 November 30 (man001486)	box 04	folder 06
District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1932 November 01 to 1933 October 31 (man001487)	box 04	folder 06

f	Annual Statistical Report (and supplements) of Extension Workers For Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1932 December 01 to 1933 November 30 (man001488)	box 04	folder 07
I	District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1932 November 01 to 1933 October 31 man001489)	box 04	folder 07
I	District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1932 November 01 to 1933 October 31 man001490)	box 04	folder 07
а	Combined Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1933 November 01 to 1934 November 01 (man001491)	box 04	folder 08
	Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1934 (man001492)	box 04	folder 08
a	District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1934 May 01 to 1934 October 31 man001493)	box 04	folder 08
	Extension Activities Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1934 November 01 to 1935 October 31 (man001494)	box 04	folder 09
a	Combined Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1934 November 01 to 1935 October 31 man001495)	box 04	folder 09
	University of Nevada Annual Agricultural Report for Clark and Lincoln counties, narrative summary, 1939 (man001496)	box 04	folder 10
I	University of Nevada Annual Agricultural Report for Clark, Churchill, Lander, and Nye counties narrative summary from 1943 containing edits from 1944 summary, 1944 (man001497)	box 04	folder 11
	District Extension Agent Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Nye Counties, Nevada, 1943 November 01 to 1944 October 31 (man001498)	box 04	folder 12
F	Agricultural Extension Work Combined Annual Narrative Report for Pahrump Valley and Clark and Nye Counties, Nevada, 1955 November 01 to 1956 October 31 (man001499)	box 04	folder 13
	Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County Extension Agents, 1955 November 01 to 1956 October 31 (man001500)	box 04	folder 13
F	Agricultural Extension Work Combined Annual Narrative Report for Pahrump Valley and Clark and Nye Counties, Nevada, 1957 November 01 to 1958 October 31 (man001501)	box 04	folder 14
7	Agricultural Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Pahrump Valley and Clark and Nye Counties, Nevada, 1957 November 01 to 1958 October 31 (man001502)	box 04	folder 14
F	Agricultural Extension Work Combined Annual Narrative Report for Pahrump Valley and Clark and Nye Counties, Nevada, 1957 November 01 to 1958 October 31 (man001503)	box 04	folder 14

Mathews Canyon and Pine Canyon Flood Control Reservoirs Fact Sheet, 1958 August 19 (man001504)	box 04	folder 14
Agricultural Extension Work Combined Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Southern Nye Counties, Nevada, 1958 November 01 to 1959 October 31 (man001505)	box 05	folder 01
Agricultural Extension Work Combined Annual Narrative Report for Clark and Southern Nye Counties, Nevada, 1959 November 01 to 1960 October 31 (man001506)	box 05	folder 02
Combined Annual Statistical Report of Clark County, Nevada Extension Agents, 1959 November 01 to 1960 October 31 (man001507)	box 05	folder 02
Out of State Counties, 1917 to 1920		
Annual Agricultural Report for Uintah, County, Utah, 1917 to 1920	box 05	folder 03

e/Description		ers
Clark County, 1925 to 1928		
District Extension Agent Annual Narrative Report for Clark County, Nevada, 1924 November 01 to 1925 October 31 (man001509)	box 05	folder 04
Southeastern District of Nevada Extension Agent Annual Report, 1925 (man001510)	box 05	folder 04
Clark County, Nevada Farm Bureau Annual Report of Extension Activities, 1926 (man001511)	box 05	folder 05
District Extension Agent Annual Report for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1926 (man001512)	box 05	folder 05
Clark County Farm Bureau Annual Report of Extension Activities for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1927 (man001513)	box 05	folder 06
Final Report of District Extension Agent for Clark County, Nevada, 1927 March 31 (man001514)	box 05	folder 06
District Extension Agent Annual Narrative Report for Clark County, Nevada, 1927 (man001515)	box 05	folder 06
Clark County Farm Bureau Annual Report of Extension Activities for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1927 December 01 to 1928 October 31 (man001516)	box 05	folder 07
Lincoln County, 1925 to 1929		
Lincoln County Farm Bureau Annual Report of Extension Activities, 1924 November 01 to 1925 October 31 (man001517)	box 05	folder 08
Lincoln County Form Purcou Annual Deport of Extension Activities		

	box 05	folder 09
District Extension Agent Annual Report for Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties, Nevada, 1926 (man001519)	box 05	folder 09
Lincoln County Farm Bureau Annual Report of Extension Activities, 1927 (man001520)	box 05	folder 10
District Extension Agent Final Report for Lincoln County, Nevada, 1927 March 31 (man001521)	box 05	folder 10
Lincoln County Farm Bureau Annual Report of Extension Activities, 1928 (man001522)	box 05	folder 11
Lincoln County Farm Bureau Annual Report of Extension Activities, 1928 November 01 to 1929 October 31 (man001523)	box 05	folder 12
District Extension Work Annual Narrative Report for Lincoln County, Nevada, 1928 November 01 to 1929 October 31 (man001524)	box 05	folder 12
Annual Statistical Report of Extension Workers for Clark and Lincoln Counties, Nevada, 1928 August 15 to 1929 November 01 (man001525)	box 05	folder 12

Description	Contain	ers
Clark County, 1927 to 1942		
Agricultural Soil Conservation Project, 1937 to 1942 (man001526)	box 06	folder 01
Alfalfa Variety Tests Project, 1928 to 1930 (man001527)	box 06	folder 02
Asparagus Production Project, 1928 to 1933 (man001528)	box 06	folder 03
Boys and Girls 4H Club Work Project, 1928 to 1942 (man001529)	box 06	folder 04
Commercial Fertilizer Project, 1929 to 1936 (man001530)	box 06	folder 05
Control of White Top Project, 1928 to 1932 (man001531)	box 06	folder 06
Corn-Hog Project, 1934 (man001532)	box 06	folder 07
County Planning Project, 1929 to 1942 (man001533)	box 06	folder 08
Cow Testing Circle Project, 1928 to 1932 (man001534)	box 06	folder 09

	box 06	folder 10
Emergency Relief Project, 1934 (man001536)	box 06	folder 11
Erosion-Flood Control Project, 1936 to 1941 (man001537)	box 06	folder 12
Farmer-Banker Cooperation Project, 1930 to 1942 (man001538)	box 06	folder 13
Farm Bureau Cooperation Project, 1930 to 1942 (man001539)	box 06	folder 14
Green Manures (Campaign Stage) Project, 1929 to 1932 (man001540)	box 06	folder 15
Green Manures: Wild Hemp (Test Stage) Project, 1929 to 1941 (man001541)	box 06	folder 16
Grow Healthy Chicks Project, 1929 to 1936 (man001542)	box 06	folder 17
Home Water Supplies and Improvements Project, 1936 to 1938 (man001543)	box 06	folder 18
Irrigation District (Flood Control) Project, 1929 to 1941 (man001544)	box 06	folder 19
Live Stock Production and Marketing Project, 1936 to 1941 (man001545)	box 06	folder 20
Marketing Dairy Products Project, 1930 to 1940 (man001546)	box 06	folder 21
Meat and Provisions Project, 1936 to 1942 (man001547)	box 06	folder 22
Potato Variety Tests Project, 1928 to 1931 (man001548)	box 06	folder 23
Poultry Housing (Campaign Stage) Project, 1929 to 1930 (man001549)	box 06	folder 24
Power Line Extensions (Rural) Project, 1936 to 1939 (man001550)	box 06	folder 25
Puncture Vine Eradication Project, 1928 to 1932 (man001551)	box 06	folder 26
Pure Bred Sires Project, 1928 to 1932 (man001552)	box 06	folder 27
Relief of Destitution Project, 1932 to 1933 (man001553)	box 06	folder 28
Seed Corn Improvement Project, 1928 to 1930 (man001554)	box 06	folder 29
Company Device Device and Manager Line Device (Company 2004 EEE)		

Sugar Beet Production and Marketing Project (man001555)

	box 06	folder 30
Taylor Grazing Act Project, 1936 (man001556)	box 06	folder 31
Turkey Project, 1929 to 1936 (man001557)	box 06	folder 32
Vegetable Production and Marketing Project, 1928 to 1964 (man001558)	box 06	folder 33
Wild Morning Glory Weed Project, 1929 to 1942 (man001559)	box 06	folder 34
Miscellaneous: Animal Control Projects, 1932 to 1934 (man001560)	box 06	folder 35
Miscellaneous: Rural Needs Projects, 1932 to 1939 (man001561)	box 06	folder 36
Combined or Other Counties, 1931 to 1939		
Commercial Fertilizer Project for Lincoln, 1931 to 1932 (man001562)	box 06	folder 37
Erosion-Flood Control Project for Lincoln, 1931 to 1932 (man001563)	box 06	folder 38
Farm Account and Loan Project for Clark and Lincoln, 1932 to 1939 (man001564)	box 06	folder 39
Poultry Enterprise Efficiency and Cost Project for Clark and Lincoln, 1931 to 1934 (man001565)	box 06	folder 40
Potato Seed Production Project for Lincoln and White Pine, 1932 (man001566)	box 06	folder 41
Range Improvements: White River Drainage Basin Project for Clark, Nye, and White Pine, 1931 to 1932 (man001567)	box 06	folder 42

Series IV: Special Projects, Southern Nevada, 1915 to 1950			
Title/Description		Containers	
Conservation Plan for City of Las Vegas, 1945 (man001568)	box 06	folder 43	
Dam Construction: Pine and Matthew, 1935 to 1947 (man001569)	box 06	folder 44	
Dam Reclamation: Boulder Canyon Project, 1931 to 1947 (man001570)	box 06	folder 45	
Department of Range Management Project Annual Report, 1915 to 1916 (man001571)	box 06	folder 46	

Drainage and Water Storage Project for Moapa Valley District, 1937 to 1950 (man001572)	box 06	folder 47
Flood Control Reports and Maps for Southern Nevada (folder 1 of 2), 1934 to 1950 (man001573)	box 06	folder 48
Flood Control Reports and Maps for Southern Nevada (folder 2 of 2), 1934 to 1950 (man001574)	box 06	folder 49
Flood Pictures: Mt. Pleasant, 1946 July (man001575)	box 06	folder 50
Irrigation Project for Southern Nevada: Moapa and Virgin Valleys, 1927 to 1945 (man001576)	box 06	folder 51
Reclamation: Lewiston Orchard Project, 1947 September (man001577)	box 06	folder 52
Water Leakage from Artesian Wells for Las Vegas Project, 1938 (man001578)	box 06	folder 53
Soil Conservation for Moapa Valley: Proposal, Reports, and Maps, 1937 to 1949 (man001579)	box 06	folder 54

Correspondence, 1950 (man001587)

e/Description		ers
Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Report and Correspondence, 1898 to 1901		
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Report, 1898 (man001580)	box 06	folder 55
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Report and Correspondence, 1900 (man001581)	box 06	folder 56
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Report, 1901 (man001582)	box 06	folder 57
Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Report and Correspondence, 1942 to 1972		
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1942 July 01 (man001583)	box 06	folder 58
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Report, 1943 April 23 (man001584)	box 06	folder 59
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Report, 1947 (man001585)	box 06	folder 60
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1949 (man001586)	box 06	folder 61
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Report and		

	box 06	folder 62
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1951 (man001588)	box 06	folder 63
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1952 (man001589)	box 06	folder 64
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1953 (man001590)	box 06	folder 65
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1954 (man001591)	box 06	folder 66
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1955 (man001592)	box 06	folder 67
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1956 (man001593)	box 06	folder 68
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1965 (man001594)	box 06	folder 69
Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1972 (man001595)	box 06	folder 70
Nevada, Moapa Valley, 1949		
Moapa Valley Agricultural Experiment Station Correspondence, 1949 (man001596)	box 06	folder 71

tle/Description		Containers	
Nevada Water Reports and Pamphlets: water and flooding related reports and surveys, 1931 to 1965			
Water Resources Development by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Nevada: report, 1965 January 01 (man001597)	box 06	folder 72	
Nevada Power Market Survey: report, 1949 February (man001598)	box 06	folder 72	
The Water Resources of Las Vegas Valley: report, 1931 March (man001599)	box 06	folder 72	
Bureau of Reclamation: resolutions for Virgin Valley and Colorado River, and Nevada's Statement on Dixie Project, 1945 to 1950 (man001600)	box 06	folder 73	
Water Supply, Requirements, and Costs Reports: for various locations, 1938 to 1950 (man001601)	box 06	folder 74	

Water Conference booklets for Colorado River Water Assoc. and Western Interstate, 1964 September to 1964 December

Colorado River Water Users Association Twenty-First Annual Meeting: booklet, 1964 December 03 to 1964 December 04 (man001602)	box 06	folder 75
Western Interstate Water Conference Proceedings, 1964 September 16 to 1964 September 17 (man001603)	box 06	folder 75
Water Resources: Interstate Projects in Nevada and the West: Department of Interior charts, and resource pamphlets, 1945 to 1964 (man001604)	box 06	folder 76
Water Resource Publications from various out of state groups, 1942 to 1949 (man001605)	box 06	folder 77

itle/Description		Containers	
Agricultural Publications from various agriculture groups, 1942 to 1964 (man001676)	box 07	folder 01	
Natural Resources of Nevada, 1964 (man001677)	box 07	folder 02	
Report of the Regents of the University of Nevada, 1945 to 1946	box 07	folder 03	
The Nauvoo Temple-Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (man001678)	box 07	folder 04	
Graphite sketch of man by John Wittwer, 1969 to 1970	flat file 08		

[^] Return to Table of Contents

[^] Return to Table of Contents