



## FINDING AID

### **W. VERDE WATSON PAPERS 1935-1963(bulk dates: 1935-ca. 1955)**

Prepared by  
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## ***HISTORY***

William Verde Watson, was born on June 23, 1903, at Bancroft, Nebraska. Shortly after, his family moved to a peach ranch at Paonia, Colorado, where he spent his boyhood. He attended the University of Colorado where he met his future wife, Margaret Emanuel. His first job was as an oil field geologist in New Mexico. Apparently he was not able to obtain his college degree on schedule, but after some remedial studies, a B.A. in Geology was conferred on June 13, 1932. He was married on October 10, 1927, while working at his New Mexico job. That very good job came to an end with the onset of the Great Depression of 1929.

His first Depression job was a temporary position with the Park Service at Canyon de Chelly National Monument during most of the year 1931. Through 1932, 1933, and 1934, he worked summers as a temporary ranger at Yellowstone, but was unemployed during the winter. Finally, in the fall of 1935, he was offered a permanent ranger position at Yellowstone, and was told to immediately prepare to spend the coming winter snowed in at Old Faithful. Watson's son, Bruce, reminisces: "I was 6 years old at the time. I remember it well as a high point of my life, but I still don't fully understand how they did it. I do know that they had no money whatsoever, and had to obtain supplies for a long winter. Thanks to the General Store at Gardiner they were provided with credit to provide for the family all winter, and somehow he managed to purchase a new Cine-Kodak Eight movie camera."

Watson's winter activities as a Park Ranger are well documented on the films in the collection. These included helping the hotel and lodge winterkeepers with their main job of removing snow from roofs, even though that was not his job. Bruce recalls: "Also, the hotel winterkeeper decided to invent and build a "snow plane", using the equipment available at the hotel maintenance facilities and Dad helped with that somewhat frivolous project. When I wasn't keeping track of what they were doing, I was watching Old Faithful erupt and keeping track of the time between eruptions. At that time, the ranger station was located in the nearest timbered area just west of the geyser."

The following winter of 1936-1937, the Watson family was snowed in at the Snake River Ranger Station at the south entrance. This station was a large two story duplex, and Jud Rhodes, Watson's partner for the winter, lived in the other unit with his wife and baby daughter. Jud and Watson made regular ski patrols of the entire south side of the park. Bruce explains: "Somehow they were able to locate patrol cabins under 6 feet or more of snow even though they had never been in the area before. Years later, as a Fire Guard, I had to do the same thing on horseback during the summer. These cabins included Heart Lake, Cabin Creek, Thorofare and some others I can't remember. He exposed as much film as he could afford. One of these scenes was of Jud Rhodes sitting on a block of stove wood fishing for mackinaw lake trout through a hole in the six feet of ice on Heart Lake."

During the subsequent years leading to World War II, the family moved twice a year and spent summers and/or winters at most of the ranger stations in the Park. While stationed at Old Faithful Inn during the summer of 1942, Watson's youngest son, 3 1/2 year old Kent, was mauled by a bear. Saved by the wife of a summer Ranger Naturalist, Kent was wrapped in blankets and

sped via Watson's patrol car, to the hospital in Livingston, Montana. After many weeks in the hospital, Kent fully recovered and was released with only a large bald spot on the top of his head.

After Pearl Harbor, Watson enlisted in the Coast Guard and was given command of a beach patrol station at Grayland, Washington. Toward the end of the war he was transferred to the beach patrol station at Copalis Beach, Washington. After the war he returned to Yellowstone and accepted the position of Assistant Park Naturalist. He subsequently served as Chief Park Naturalist at Cape Hatteras National Seashore and later transferred to the same position at Mt. McKinley (now Denali) National Park. He retired from the Park Service about 1967 and moved to Glenwood Springs, Colorado. At Glenwood Springs, Verde and Margaret built the first home they had ever owned and Watson became a professional piano technician (tuner).

In August 1978, the couple drove to Tijuana, Mexico for specialized treatment for Margaret's cancer. It turned out that Verde was the one with cancer, and within a week he died from advanced liver cancer. He passed away on August 29, 1978, at Tijuana, Mexico.

(Biography and memories contributed by Bruce Watson, May 18, 2010)

## ***SCOPE AND CONTENT***

W. VERDE WATSON PAPERS  
1935-1963 (bulk dates: 1935-ca. 1955)

*CATALOG NUMBER* YELL 189804

*VOLUME* 0.5 LF

*DESCRIPTION* The W. Verde Watson Papers contain correspondence, diaries, photographs, films, research notes, and writings related to his time as a Park Ranger in Yellowstone National Park.

The materials document life as a Ranger in Yellowstone National Park in the era surrounding World War II. Topics discussed include employment and promotion, travel within the park, wildlife sightings, social events, museum cataloging and interpretation activities, the development of the Park's infrastructure, and the research and writing of a natural history publication about the Norris Geyser Basin.

The films show ranger activities including snowshoeing, patrolling on horseback, winter in the park, a pack trip, fighting a forest fire, and building and testing the snowplane. Locations include Old Faithful, West Yellowstone (MT), Heart Lake, Yellowstone Falls, Gallatin Ranger Station, Sportsman's Lake, Glacier National Park (MT), and Waterton Lake. There are also images of the Watson family and fellow rangers including W. Verde Watson, Peg Watson, Bruce Watson, Boyd Watson, Lee Coleman, and Frank Anderson.

*ORGANIZATION* The collection is arranged in folders according to document type and the folders ordered alphabetically by title. Within the folders, documents are arranged chronologically. All but three photographs and all nine films were separated to the museum and film collections, respectively, and separation sheets placed in the original location to note the new storage site.

*PROVENANCE*

Gift of Bruce V. Watson in 1992.

*RESTRICTIONS*

YES

*ASSOCIATED  
MATERIALS*

Official records by W. Verde Watson may be found in the Yellowstone National Park Archives K110-111 (as of 5/7/2010). Photographs by Watson are located in the Museum collection. Items associated with accession YELL-1777 form his personal collection, photographs taken as part of his official duties form a part of accession YELL-1047. Films taken by Watson are located in the Film Collection, catalog # 183993, reels R032-R040. Watson's final version of the Norris Geyser Basin publication, *Norris, the Geyser Basin, the Road, and the Man* (1961), and a map drawn by him are located in the Yellowstone Research Library's collection. Materials regarding Watson's time at Mt. McKinley (Denali) and Cape Hatteras National Parks may be found in the collections of those parks, respectively.

***CONTAINER LIST*****Box 1**

<b>File Unit Nbr</b>	<b>Title</b>
01	Correspondence
02	Diary
03	Diary
04	Diary
05	Photographs and films
06	Photographs, Norris Geyser Basin illustrations
07	Writings, Norris Geyser Basin notes
08	Writings, Norris Geyser Basin annotated typescript
09	Writings, Norris Geyser Basin annotated typescript (cont'd)
10	Writings, Norris Geyser Basin typescript
11	Writings, A Ranger's Wintertime Adventure