

Yoland Skeete-Laessig Collection

c.1960-2008 (bulk 2000-2008)*

*copies of material and photographs from early 20th century onwards



Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center
The Newark Public Library
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URL: <http://www.npl.org/Pages/Collections/njic.html>

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Location: Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center (Offsite)
Size: 2.25 linear feet (3 Hollinger boxes, 1 Paige Box)
Format: Mixed materials
Processed: Minimally processed by Beth Zak-Cohen, 2017
Time Period: 1960-2008, bulk 2000-2008
Call Number: MG Nwk Skeete-Laessig
Access policy: Open for research

Restrictions on Access

Use Restrictions

Researchers wishing to publish reproduce, or reprint materials from this collection must obtain permission.

Preferred Citation

Yoland Skeete-Laessig Collection, the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center, Newark Public Library.

Abstract

This collection consists of various materials resulting from Yoland Skeete-Laessig's work on the book "When Newark Had a Chinatown: My Personal Journey", as well as her fight to save the historical area of Chinatown from being redeveloped as an arena. There is also some material from her career as one of the founders of the art gallery Sumei Multidisciplinary Arts Center.

Scope and Content:

Much of Skeete-Laessig's research was donated to NYU (see Bibliography). However, this collection contains some valuable oral histories and photographs of historical Chinatown (series 5). It also contains materials from Skeete-Laessig's research (series 1, 2 and 4) on Chinatown and several events she was able to stage to honor Newark's Chinatown (series 3, series 5). Another important subject of the collection is the fight to prevent the building of Prudential Arena in the area that was historically Chinatown (series 5, separated materials). Lastly, Series 3 touches on some of the other art events held at Sumei and in the wider Newark community.

Provenance:

Gift of Yoland Skeete-Laessig.

Processing Notes:

Very minimal processing has been done. Photos and ephemera need more processing. Photographs were removed from binders and foldered. CDs and DVDs were placed in envelopes and numbered.

Historical Note:

Yoland Skeete-Laessig was one of the founders of Sumei Art Center. Sumei Multidisciplinary Arts Center was founded in Newark, NJ in 1993 by a collective of artists, musicians and writer. From its website, "Sumei Art Center hosts national and international exhibits, workshops for children and adults, lectures, cultural education, artist workshops, presentations, and programs and music from the many different cultures that make up our diverse country."

While at Sumei, Skeete-Laessig became interested in Newark's Chinatown and began the Newark Chinatown History Project which culminated in a book "When Newark Had a Chinatown : My Personal Journey" (2016). She also hosted many lectures and events for former residents of Chinatown. At its peak in 1922, Newark's Chinatown was home to 3,000 residents but by the 1950s, they had dispersed as many families moved into New Jersey's suburbs.

When Newark's Prudential Arena was proposed (broke ground in 2005), Skeete-Laessig protested the fact that the construction would destroy the historical area of Newark's Chinatown. She joined other protesters, some of whom were concerned about different issues such as cost to Newark residents. Skeete-Laessig also combed the area for historical artifacts from Chinatown which she saved and documented. Eventually, Prudential Arena was built in the area and continues to function as an arena for music and sports events.

Besides her work on Newark's Chinatown, Skeete-Laessig is an artist and documentarian whose work has been exhibited internationally.

Series Descriptions:

Series 1 Building Research

This series contains copies of property transfers and deeds for various buildings in the Chinatown area. The copies were made recently, but the original documents date from the 1920s to 1980s. Documents are foldered as originally foldered by Ms. Skeete-Laessig (two Eng folders were combined).

Series 2 Miscellaneous Papers

This series contains three folders of papers, mostly research material. The first folder contains material on the Chinese in Belleville. The second folder is personal materials (recommendation letter, passport request) for specific Chinese woman in Newark – Yi-Ling Fan and her family. The third folder contains research materials.

Series 3 Publicity Materials

This series contains brochures, fliers and published materials on events and art galleries, mostly in Newark. Folder 1 contains events on Newark's Chinatown, sponsored by or held at Sumei. The second folder contains Sumei sponsored (or events held at Sumei) which were not related to Chinatown. The third folder contains material from other art galleries.

Series 4 Publications

This series contains books and other publications. Most were likely used for research on Chinatowns. There is also a book from a Rutgers-Newark art exhibit (Hair).

Series 5 Audiovisual Materials Etc.

This series consists of photographs removed from 7 binders, as well as four folders of other photographs, mostly of the fight against the arena and of Chinatown in the 2000s. Material from the last binder includes photographs as well as newspaper clippings of the arena fight. This material is mostly unprocessed, except for housing. There is also a set of historical Chinatown photos in negative form. There are also 41 CDs and DVDs, most of which contain photographs. Again most are recent photographs (including photographs of Sumei events on Chinatown) but

several CDs contain historical Chinatown photographs and maps. Some also contain text files with drafts for the Chinatown book. Of note is #19 which has video of a full Newark Chinatown reunion and #21 and #25 which have historical Chinatown photos.

Access points:

Subject Names

Skeete-Laessig, Yoland

Subject Organizations

Sumei Multidisciplinary Arts Center

Subject Topics

Chinatowns -- New Jersey -- Newark

Chinese -- New Jersey -- Newark

Newark (N.J.) -- History

Art museums -- New Jersey -- Newark.

Subject Places

Newark, N.J.

Document Types

Photographs

CD-ROMS

DVDs

Research (documents)

Audiocassettes

Bibliography

The material in this collection was used to write the book "When Newark had a Chinatown : my personal journey" by Yoland Skeete-Laessig ; edited by Hal Laessig, which is held in the Newark Public Library collection (974.932004951 Sk3wh).

Much more material was donated to NYU. It can be found under TAM 614 with a finding aid at http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/tamwag/tam_614/index.html.

For information on Newark's Chinatown see:

- Newark Evening News Microfilmed Clipping File, Newark – Chinatown
- "Newark's Chinatown" [CD of Newark History Society Program, 974.932004951 N42]
- Picture file: Newark – Nationality Groups

Separated Materials

A DVD entitled "Full reunion" was cataloged as, "TITLE".

A CD of newspaper clippings from the same donor were previously catalogued under 974.932 N422ch, "Newark Chinatown & Newark arena".

Container List:

<u>Series 1 – Building Research</u>			
<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Folder Title</u>	<u>Dates</u>
1	1	56-60, 74-82 Lafayette, 37 Columbia, 196-200 Mulberry	

1	2	Nellie Eng Poperties / Eng Laundry	
1	3	202 Mulberry	
1	4	191-195 Mulberry	
1	5	196-200 Mulberry	
1	6	Property Transfers	
Series 2- Miscellaneous Papers			
1	7	Belleville	2001
1	8	Yi-Ling Fan	1960s
1	9	Research Materials	c. 2000
Series 3 – Publicity Materials			
1	10	Sumei Chinatown	2005-2006
1	11	Sumei Not Chinatown	2000-2008
1	12	Art Not Sumei	2005-2006
Series 4 – Publications			
<u>Box #</u>	<u>Folder #</u>	<u>Folder Title</u>	<u>Dates</u>
2	1	To Save China To Save Ourselves	1992
2	2	Asian Women	1971
2	3	Hair Rutgers Newark Galleries	
2	4	Social Morality in Traditional China	Copy (published 1962)
2	5	Chinese Immigration and Chinese in the United States	1996
Series 5 – Audiovisual Materials Etc.			
3		Oral history cassette tapes: Harriet Eng-Achson, Eduardo (no last name), Sylvia Lee, Harry Kee Chee, Gladys Eng Chin (4 tapes), Leslie Eng Wong (2 tapes), 1 unlabeled tape	Undated
3		Historical photo negatives	Undated
3		41 CD/DVDs (numbered)	2000s, undated
OV1		Unprocessed Photos (4 folders)	
OV1		Buildings CHARG (pages of photographs removed from binder with this title)	
OV1		CHARG (pages of photographs removed from binder with this title)	
OV1		CHARG Nwk Buildings (2 folders, pages of photographs removed from binder with this title)	
OV1		Neighbor Destruction (2 folders, pages of photographs removed from binder with this title)	
OV1		PR/AI6 (pages of photographs removed from binder with this title)	
OV1		Asians in New Jersey (3 folders, pages of photographs removed from binder with this title)	
OV1		CHARG + clippings (2 folders,, pages of photographs removed from binder with this title)	