

Center for Creative Photography

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Finding aid for the  
Wright Morris Collection, 1930-1980  
AG 190

## **Wright Morris Collection, 1930-1980**

### **AG 190**

#### **Creator**

Morris, Wright

#### **Abstract**

Photographic materials, 1930s- 1980, of Wright Morris (1910-1998), photographer and writer. Consists of black and white film negatives in a variety of formats, color 35 mm slides, videotapes, and a small selection of portraits of Morris and his wife, Josephine.

#### **Quantity/ Extent**

3 linear feet

#### **Language of Materials**

English

#### **Biographical/ Historical Note**

Wright Morris (1910-1998) was a renowned writer and affective photographer. Pairing photographs with his own writing, Morris pioneered a new tradition of “photo-texts” in the 1940s that proved highly influential to future photographers. Devoid of figures, his photographs depict everyday objects and atmosphere. Morris’s poetic images exist in a fictional narrative, but reference documentary style.

Born in Nebraska, Morris attended Pomona College in Claremont, California. After graduation he traveled throughout Europe, purchasing his first camera in Vienna. Morris returned to California in 1934 determined to become a writer, but also continued to photograph. In 1935, he bought a Rolleiflex camera and began photographing extensively. Morris first exhibited his photo-texts in 1940, at the New School for Social Research in New York. This same year the Museum of Modern Art purchased prints for their collection and New Directions published images that would become his first book.

In 1942, Morris received the first of his three Guggenheim Fellowships, funding the completion of *The Inhabitants*. Published by Scribners, *The Inhabitants* (1946) documented domestic scenes of the South, Midwest, and Southwest and although visually influential enjoyed little financial success. His second photo-text book, *The Home Place* (1948) was a visual novel, with short fictional prose accompanying each photograph. Although groundbreaking, it remained unmarketable and after its publication Morris invested in his more successful career as a writer. In 1956, Morris

won the National Book Award for his tenth book, the unillustrated *A Field of Vision*. Morris continued to write and publish while teaching English and creative writing from 1962-1974 at San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California. Morris's acclaimed novel, *Plains Song* won American Book Award for Fiction 1981.

The Museum of Modern Art proved supportive of Morris throughout his career, both exhibiting and purchasing his work. MoMA curator John Szarkowski prompted a reconsideration of Wright Morris with the publication of *God's Country and My People* (1968), widely considered Morris's most successful photo-text book. Morris's exhibition career burgeoned in his later years with many shows including *Wright Morris: Origin of a Species*, a 1992 retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and following his death, *Distinctly American: The Photography of Wright Morris* at Stanford's Cantor Center of Art in 2002.

The Wright Morris archive contains 357 vintage prints (printed by Morris and under his supervision); a portfolio of 12 modern prints published by the Witkin Gallery in 1981; about 500 prints work prints; and photographic materials including black and white film negatives in a variety of formats, color 35mm slides, videotapes, and a small selection of portraits of Morris and his wife, Josephine Kantor.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Morris arranged and identified many of his negatives according to projects, trips, and subjects. The majority of the negatives are unidentified, however. They range from his earliest negatives of a European trip in the early 1930s and also include images from his cross-country trip in 1938; his summer on Cape Cod; work done over many years for *The Inhabitants*; work in the South including Faulkner country, North Carolina, West Virginia, and New Orleans; work in the West including Colorado, Wyoming, and California; work for the 1942 and 1946 Guggenheim projects; and many negatives shot for *The Home Place* project.

Box 2 may be viewed at the discretion of the archivist. This is a small group of 4 x 5 inch negatives severely damaged by the deterioration of their acetate film base.

The black and white negatives have been resleeved and reboxed but they have not been researched or organized. Boxes 5 – 7 are in Morris's original groupings which sometimes do not match the negatives within the groups.

### **Arrangement**

This collection has not been fully processed.

Series 1: Photographic Materials, circa 1930s – 1950s, 8 boxes

Series 2: Audiovisual Materials, 1980, 1 box

## Names and Subject Terms

Morris, Wright [<http://vocab.getty.edu/ulan/500037016>]

## Restrictions

### Conditions Governing Access

Access to this collection requires an appointment with the Volkerding Study Center.

Severely deteriorated negatives may be viewed at the discretion of the archivist.

### Conditions Governing Use

Copyright for the photography of Wright Morris is held by the Center for Creative Photography. Rights to Morris's writings are administered by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, Archives and Special Collections, P.O. Box 884100, Lincoln, NE 68588-4100.

## Provenance

This collection was a bequest of the photographer's widow, Josephine Morris, to the Arizona Board of Regents on behalf of the University of Arizona. The bulk of the materials arrived at the Center in 2003.

## Related Materials

Photographs: As part of the bequest to the Center, 357 fine vintage prints printed by Morris and under his supervision, a portfolio of 12 modern prints published by the Witkin Gallery in 1981, and about 500 prints of lesser quality were added to the collection. These photographs are stored in the Center's Photograph Collection.

Writings: A large collection of Morris's correspondence, holograph manuscripts for his novels such as *The Plains Song* and other publications, recorded lectures and interviews, selections from his personal library, writings about Morris, personal papers, and clipping files are in the collection of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, Archives and Special Collections.

## Preferred Citation

Wright Morris Collection, 1930-1980. AG190. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

## Processing Information

Preliminary processing completed by Amy Rule, April 2003. Additional resleeving done by Jennifer Nichols, October 2005. Finding aid updated by Paige Hilman, January 2018.

## Container List

### Series 1: Photographic Materials, circa 1930 – circa 1950

Note: Morris arranged and identified many of his negatives according to projects, trips, and subjects. The majority of the negatives are unidentified, however. They range from his earliest negatives of a European trip in the early 1930s and also include images from his cross-country trip in 1938; his summer on Cape Cod; work done over many years for *The Inhabitants*; work in the South including Faulkner country, North Carolina, West Virginia, and New Orleans; work in the West including Colorado, Wyoming, and California; work for the 1942 and 1946 Guggenheim projects; and many negatives shot for *The Home Place* project.

The negatives have been resleeved and reboxed but they have not been researched or organized. The following are Morris's own groupings which sometimes do not match the negatives within the groups.

Severely deteriorated negatives may be viewed at the discretion of the archivist. These have been segregated from the rest of the negatives. All are Kodak commercial film base. Some are *Home Place* images, but most are unidentified.

#### Box

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Portraits of Wright Morris, Josephine Morris, and their cat<br><br>Production materials, collage pieces<br><br>Color 35 mm slides made in Venice, n. d. |
| 2 | Severely deteriorated negatives [restricted access]   |
| 4 | Original negative boxes and sleeves that Morris used  |
| 5 | Negatives, Groups 1 to 10   |
| 6 | Negatives, Groups 13 to 25  |
| 7 | Negatives, Groups 26B to 83   |
| 8 | 4 x 5 inch and smaller negatives, some identified   |
| 9 | 4 x 5 inch and smaller negatives, some identified   |

#### Index: Negatives

GROUP NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	FORMAT	NUMBER OF NEGS
1	Unidentified		201
2	Profiles	Various	52
3A	Unidentified		58
3B	Cape Cod, Home Place, etc.		50
4	[no group with this number]		--
5	Scripps, 1937		91
6	Nebraska "as is"	4 x 5	84

7	Identified, 1940	3 ¼ x 4 ¼	86
8	Identified, 1941-41	3 ¼ x 4 ¼	78
9	Mixed rejects		200+
10	Select, 1936-37; Rolleiflex shots on tripod		52
11	[no group with this number]		--
12	Damaged negatives [see Box 2]		36
13	Home Place "as is"	4 x 5	90
14	Home Place and Nebraska	4 x 5	54
15	Home Place and Nebraska	4 x 5	64
16	Unidentified	Various	45
17	Home Place, Nebraska, 1947	4 x 5	75
18A	Mix of 1940-41 identified	3 ¼ x 4 ¼	58
18B	Miscellany, Scripps, 1937	2 x 2	82
19	Nebraska, late (Valley Forge 1954?)	4 x 5	64
20	Lincoln	4 x 5	58
21	Identified, Home Place, 1947, 1950; Colorado, 1943	3 ¼ x 4 ¼	79
22	Unidentified		41
23	Trip west, 1940; trip east, 1941	3 ¼ x 4 ¼	70
24	Early, trip east from CA to PA, 1943		69
25	Identified, 1940-41	3 ¼ x 4 ¼	100
26A	Trip west and the return, 1940-41	3 ¼ x 4 ¼	97
26B	Unidentified	Various	25
27	Early Europe	1 x 1 ½	26
28	Reproductions	2 x 2	100
29	Identified, 1935-37	2 ¼ x 3 ¼	100
30	Unidentified		100
31	Portraits	Mostly 2 x 2	100
52	Portraits of Morris		4
62	Unidentified		56
83	Select negatives, 1940	3 ¼ x 4 ¼	100
Brown envelope	Excellent negatives, Home Place, etc.		43
White envelope	Wicker chair, Central City, barber shop		3

### Series 2: Videotapes, 1980

Note: Morris visited the CCP in 1980 and was interviewed on two occasions. These were recorded on ¾ inch videotape. The master tape is in the CCP Library collection. The copies in the Morris Collection are viewing copies available to researchers for use at the Center. 1 box.

Box

3

Morris interviews, 1980