

B.C. and Jessie Binning fonds

Dates of creation:

1959-1972.

Physical extent:

54 cm of textual records and other material.

Biographical sketch:

Bertram Charles (B.C.) Binning was born on February 10, 1909 in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Due to an illness at a young age, he spent much of his time drawing in seclusion. His passion for art and architecture resulted in his enrolment in 1927 at the-then Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts. After spending time in the United States, in 1933 Binning was appointed to a staff position with the Vancouver School of Art. Later in 1938, B.C. Married Jessie Wyllie, the daughter of a Vancouver businessman. In 1949, he was transferred to the University Of British Columbia School Of Architecture. Soon after, he founded the Department of Fine Arts at UBC, which he headed for over twenty-five years.

With his appointment to the department of Fine Arts came a shift in his artistic direction. Whereas pre-1948 he had established himself as an internationally recognized architect, post-1948 he felt himself drawn towards expressing his creativity in oil painting. Building upon his architectural background, Binning often painted large complementary mosaic murals for various buildings and was particularly inspired by ships, marinas and seascapes in general; these were recurring themes for most of his artistic life.

The Binnings took the first of many visits to Japan in 1958. It was there that B.C. felt particularly inspired by the Japanese art and architecture he witnessed; these were a vehicle for a new and lengthy direction for his future work. While in Japan, B.C. and Jessie forged a deep relationship with Bishop Kojo Sakamoto (1875-1969), the 37th Superintendent Priest of the Kiyoshi Kojin Seicho-ji temple. A skilled calligrapher, Sakamoto's work was influenced by colleague and friend Tomioka Tessai (1836-1924), a talented painter and calligrapher in his own right. The Binnings' relationship with Sakamoto resulted in over a decade of frequent correspondence between Sakamoto, his family, and other Japanese friends with both B.C. and Jessie. After Sakamoto opened a successful Tessai exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1961, B.C. convinced him to contribute his own calligraphy for an exclusive exhibit that was eventually opened in September 1966 at the Fine Arts Gallery at the University of British Columbia.

Health problems prevented Binning from actively contributing to the art community in the early 1970's, but by this time had built up a solid repertoire of pieces that have made their mark on the Canadian art scene. After his death on March 16th 1976, Jessie continued her role as a voice and representative for her husband's work until her own death on May 25th, 2007. Her last public presence was as a consultant for an exhibit of B.C.'s work at the Vancouver Art Gallery that ran from January through April 2007.

Scope and Content:

Fonds consists of records related to the Binnings' correspondence with (predominantly) friends and colleagues overseas in Japan from 1959 to 1971, including Bishop Kojo Sakamoto and members of his family. Mostly composed of personal letters written by hand, several letters are painted using calligraphy. Other records include program brochures and news clippings for exhibits in Japan and North America, and scrapbooks assembled by the Binnings. These either commemorate various visits they took to Japan or of visits their Japanese friends took to Canada. Fonds is divided into three series:

1. Correspondence
2. Sakamoto Printed Exhibit Matter
3. Scrapbooks

Notes:

Source of supplied title proper: Title based on contents of fonds

Physical Description: Includes 19 photographs, 6 scrapbooks, and 1 decorative box

Physical Condition: Dates on envelopes are often very faint and hard to read.

Immediate source of acquisition: Records bequeathed to the Museum of Anthropology Archives by the estate of Jessie Isobel Binning in May 2007.

Arrangement: Original order maintained and variances from this principle are noted.

Language: Many records in the fonds are written in Japanese; some have translations in English.

Associated Material: The University of British Columbia Archives has a B.C. Binning fonds which contains material predominantly related to his role as professor in the faculty of Arts at UBC. The Museum of Anthropology has also received a donation of materials from the Binning Estate; predominately Japanese ceramics and scrolls from Kojo Sakamoto.

Accruals: No further accruals are expected

Series 1: Correspondence

Dates of creation:

1958-1972, n.d.

Physical extent:

42 cm of textual records. – 1 decorative box.

Scope and content:

Series consists of a voluminous amount of communication (approximately 270 letters) between both B.C. Binning and their friends and colleagues in Japan, predominantly Bishop Kojo Sakamoto, his family, and other friends and translators. The bulk of the communication occurs mostly around September 1966 onwards, when Sakamoto's calligraphy was the focus of an exhibit at the University of British Columbia.

Correspondence is presented in the form of letters, traditional scrolls, postcards, telegrams, notes, and a small amount of newspaper clippings.

Series is arranged chronologically by date, regardless of author. There are approximately eighteen correspondences that are undated that were all authored by Bishop and Kiyoko Sakamoto. These follow the dated correspondence.

Notes:

Arrangement: Original order was maintained whenever possible; some correspondence was arranged using the date stamp assigned to it at the post office upon delivery. Correspondence is generally arranged chronologically by date and year (when known) regardless of Author. Eighteen letters that lack dates follow those that are dated and are arranged by Author.

General Note: Correspondence was partially found in a decorative box that is currently being retained in Box 3 of the B.C. and Jessie Binning fonds.

Series 2: Sakamoto printed exhibit material

Dates of creation:

1961-1966, n.d.

Physical extent:

12 cm textual records. – 19 photographs.

Scope and content:

Series consists of printed materials sent from Kojo Sakamoto to the Binnings related either to the Bishop's own art, or that of his mentor, Tomioka Tessai. Printed material comes in the form of exhibit catalogues, brochures, pamphlets, and newspaper clippings. A collection of encapsulated photographs from an undated calligraphy exhibit is also found in this series.

Notes:

Source of supplied title proper: Files are titled based principally on the medium found inside, unless the subject or title was easily discernable.

Arrangement: Files are arranged in the order they appeared in an accessioned box titled 'Sakamoto Printed Exhibit Material.'

Language: Printed matter in this series is predominantly written in Japanese with little translation into English. Future archival work on this fonds would involve titling and dating files after a brief translation of the contents.

Series 3: Scrapbooks

Dates of creation:

1958 – [1969]

Physical extent:

6 scrapbooks. – 0.5 cm textual records.

Scope and content:

Series consists of 6 scrapbooks assembled by the Binnings, either as commemorative souvenirs of their travels or as gifts to their Japanese friends overseas for a period of time covering over a decade. Scrapbooks consist predominantly of photographs, but also include brief notes and newspaper clippings. One file of textual records provides notes for a souvenir album assembled by B.C.

Individual item descriptions for the scrapbooks follow:

1. Scrapbook for Bishop Sakamoto [scrapbook]. – 1958. – 1 album; 21 x 27 cm
(Formal title proper for item, transcribed from title page of scrapbook)

Small number of photographs assembled by Binnings as a gift for Bishop Kojo Sakamoto after their first trip to Japan.

2. Journey in Japan [scrapbook]. – Spring 1958 – [1961]. – 1 album; 36 x 42x 7.5 cm
(Formal title proper for item, transcribed from cover of scrapbook)

Scrapbook created by B.C. and Jessie Binning to commemorate their first visit to Japan in 1958. Many notes that accompany the photographs describe how the trip transformed the direction of B.C.'s artistic and architectural works. The purpose of the trip was to study the art and artists of Japan in order to form a working relationship between one another; it specifically marked the beginning of a decade-long relationship with Bishop Kojo Sakamoto. The trip was partially sponsored by the Canada Council and the University of British Columbia.

3. The Bishop & the Tessai Temple [scrapbook]. – [1961-1969]. – 1 album; 33 x 42 cm
(Formal title proper for item, transcribed from note attached to scrapbook)

An assortment of photographs of Japanese friends and geography assembled by the Binnings over nearly a decade. Predominantly photographs of Bishop Sakamoto in 1961 up until his death in 1969.

Series 3: Scrapbooks (cont'd)

4. Souvenir of Bishop Sakamoto's Visit to Vancouver [scrapbook]. – [1960]. – 1 album; 42 x 57 cm

(Formal title proper for item, transcribed from note attached to scrapbook)

Photos taken and assembled by the Binnings commemorating Sakamoto's visit to Vancouver for the opening of the Tessai Exhibit in November 1960.

5. Photographs of Kiyoshi Kojin Temple [scrapbook]. – [1965]. – 1 album; 42.5 x 33 cm *(Formal title proper for item, transcribed from cover of scrapbook)*

Accompanied by Japanese text, the photographs in this scrapbook appear to have been assembled by the Binnings as a gift their Japanese friends abroad.

Scrapbook is written exclusively in Japanese script.

6. An Exhibition of Calligraphy by Bishop Kojo Sakamoto [scrapbook]. – Sept. 1966. – 1 album; 30 x 33 cm *(Formal title proper for item, transcribed from cover of scrapbook)*

Scrapbook assembled by the Binnings commemorating Bishop Kojo Sakamoto's September 1966 visit to UBC to open his calligraphy exhibit.