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Willie Nelson
Collection, 1975-1994,

Collection 021

8 boxes (4 linear feet) plus oversized

Acquisition: Donated by Willie Nelson, Bill & Sally Wittliff, and Jody Fischer from 1988 through 1995.

Access: Open for Research. Some restrictions may apply.

Processed by: Gwyneth Cannan, February 1995; Inventory revised by Brandy Harris, 2005.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Willie Hugh Nelson was born April 30, 1933. After his parents separated, he and his older sister Bobbie were raised by their musically inclined grandparents in Abbott, Texas. The children were started early on instruments--Bobbie on piano and Willie on guitar. By age 10, Nelson was playing in Central Texas communities with a polka band. After high school and many odd jobs, Nelson sold his songs "Family Bible" and "Night Life" and made his way to Nashville in order to establish himself in the cradle of Country Music. Nelson's talents were quickly recognized by other Nashville artists. They recorded his songs and helped him to get jobs. But Nelson's own recordings received little notice by the public. When promoter Crash Stewart told him his lyrics were ahead of his time he answered that "he wished the world would hurry and catch up with him as he needed the money" (Family Album). After a little more than 10 years struggling in Nashville, Nelson's ranch house burned to the ground and he decided to return to his home state.

In 1971, back in Central Texas, Nelson found himself suddenly in the right place at the right time. Nelson's eclectic style and warm stage presence found a receptive audience in a music scene that came to be labeled progressive country. At a time when a suit, a tie, and a clean-shaven face were the signature look of the country and western singer, Nelson adopted the more informal style of the younger members of his audience--long hair, beard, jeans, and a bandanna. A Nashville colleague told him "No one ever heard of you till you got ugly."

In 1973, Nelson held his first annual 4th of July picnic in Dripping Springs, Texas and the sweltering Independence Day celebrations became a huge event into the 1980s. During these years, Nelson became a nationally successful country and western singer who secured his status as a popular mainstream artist with the 1975 release of the concept album, *The Redheaded Stranger*.

Established as a major star in the music world, Nelson then branched into acting beginning with a small part in *The Electric Horseman* (1979). He starred in his next film, *Honeysuckle Rose* (1980), which was co-written by fellow Texan Bill Wittliff. The two collaborated again in *Barbarosa* (1982) and in the dramatization of Nelson's album *Red Headed Stranger* (1986).

In 1985, Nelson's concern for failing family farms led him to organize Farm Aid concerts in which he and other entertainers raised money to help small farmers keep their land. The effort provided welcome relief to thousands but did not stem the tide of disappearing family farms. By 1995, with seven Farm Aid concerts behind him, Nelson commented "all the money we raise these days is going to farmers who are already out of business. The [agribusiness] corporations are the only guys making money" (*Parade*, August 20, 1995, 14).

Nelson found himself owing the Internal Revenue Service millions in back taxes for the years from 1975 through 1981 due to what he avowed was bad advice and bad investments. In 1990, much of Nelson's property was seized and auctioned off. Nelson's friends and fans helped him by taking up collections and buying up his property so that he would be able to eventually buy it back. Nelson committed himself to paying off the monumental debt of taxes, interest, and penalties. He worked hard, doing a full schedule of road shows and selling an album, *Who'll buy My Memories: The I.R.S. Tapes*, through an 800 number. By mid-1994, Nelson had settled his obligation.

Nelson has recorded a prodigious body of work including the best selling albums *Shotgun Willie* (Atlantic, 1973), *Phases and Stages* (Atlantic, 1974), *Red Headed Stranger* (Columbia, 1975), *The Outlaws* (RCA, 1976), *Stardust* (Columbia 1978), *Waylon and Willie* (RCA, 1978), *Honeysuckle Rose* (Columbia, 1980), *The Highwaymen* (Columbia, 1985) and *Across the Borderline* (Columbia, 1991). He has received many honors and numerous awards throughout his career. He was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Association Hall of Fame in 1973. In 1975, he received his first Grammy for Best Male Country Vocal Performance for "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain." In 1978, he received the same award for "Georgia on My Mind." In 1976, the Country Music Association named *Wanted: The Outlaws* the album of the year and "Good Hearted Woman" the single of the year. The CMA awarded him the coveted Entertainer of the Year award in 1979. He received a Grammy for the Best Country Song for "On the Road Again" in 1981 and the Grammy Award for lifetime achievement in 1989. He was inducted into the Country Music Association Hall of Fame in 1993. Now in his sixties, a recognized living legend, the singer/songwriter continues to perform, write

songs, and record. "All I do is make music and play golf and I wouldn't want to give up either one" (Contemporary Musicians 173).

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

The collection contains song lyrics, screenplays, letters, concert programs, tour itineraries, posters, articles, clippings, personal effects, promotional items, souvenirs, and financial records. There are examples of Nelson's talent as a songwriter, material reflecting his success as a concert artist, and memorabilia. The collection contains documentation on how the funds collected through Farm Aid were used and on Nelson's troubles with the IRS. Most of the material was collected by Bill Wittliff, a friend of Willie Nelson's who wrote or co-wrote three of the films in which Willie Nelson starred: *Honeysuckle Rose* (1980), *Barbarosa* (1982), and *Red Headed Stranger* (1986).

See also: the Bill Wittliff Archive for photographs of Willie Nelson and for the film archives on *Barbarosa* and *Red Headed Stranger*, and the Bud Shrake Papers for materials used in Willie Nelson's autobiography.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series I: Works and Performance, 1977-1994, n.d.

Boxes 1-3

This series is composed of material relating to Nelson's career as a singer, songwriter and performer. It contains Nelson's own song compositions, scripts for possible movie projects, letters to Nelson suggesting songs and other projects, and Nelson's tour itineraries. Of interest are Nelson's handwritten lyrics, some scribbled on paper scraps, napkins, and hotel stationery.

Series II: Publicity, 1975-1992, n.d.

Boxes 3-4

This series contains posters, programs, flyers, product tie-ins, photos, film pressbooks, articles, clippings, T-shirts, and jackets. The material provides a general picture of the marketing done for Nelson and his band. The product tie-ins with such brands as Wrangler jeans and Country Time lemonade make use of Nelson's popularity and country image.

Series III: Awards, 1986

Box 4

One file holds a program of the Music Industry Division of the United Jewish Appeal Federation 21st Anniversary dinner honoring Willie Nelson with invitation to Bill Wittliff.

Series IV: Personal, n.d.

Box 4

This series is made up of personal effects--running shoes, bandannas, sunglasses, and t-shirts. Some of the objects are souvenirs or promotions for concerts and Nelson's benefit project, Farm Aid.

Series V: Farm Aid, 1985-1991, n.d.

Boxes 4-8

In 1985, Nelson, alarmed by reports of failing family farms, decided, with the help of other performers, to stage concert benefits. The proceeds were to be channeled to provide assistance to needy agricultural families. Bill Wittliff served as an adviser to the project. His wife, Sally Wittliff, recommended the Massachusetts social activist, Carolyn Mugar, to administer the project. The first Farm Aid concert was held September 25, 1985 in Champaign, Illinois. By 1995, Nelson had done seven Farm Aid concerts the proceeds of which provided much appreciated help to thousands of farmers in the form of food pantries, seminars, scholarship programs and grants. The files of this series belonged to Bill Wittliff and contain material on the concerts and the administration of the funds by the

Series V: Farm Aid, continued

Farm Aid organization based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Included are clippings, correspondence, annual reports, newsletters from grassroots farm organizations, publications from various state departments of agriculture, concert memorabilia, grant proposals, and applications for funding.

Series VI: IRS Penalties, 1984, 1990-1991

Box 8

This series contains a statement of financial condition dated December 31, 1984 and documents for the auction of Willie Nelson's holdings by the IRS in 1991. The documents provide the rules of sale and an inventory of the items for auction. Clippings provide news accounts of Nelson's problems with the IRS and the efforts of Nelson's friends and fans to help him.

Container List

Box Folder

Series I: Works and Performance, 1977-1994, n.d.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | Handwritten lyrics by Willie Nelson, including "I Still Can't Believe that You're Gone," "You've Got to Figure Yourself..." "Is This Just Another Song," "Why do I Write God?" "Don't Ask Me Why I Love You," "Can We Go Straight to Heaven From Here?" "If you Can't Feel the Fire," "Fast Eddie and the Japs," "Don't Start Looking for Someplace to Run To..." "Safety in Numbers," "A Bitter Pill," "Sweet Destinations," and other untitled lyrics |
| 1 | 2 | Handwritten and photocopied lyrics by Nelson and other artists including "Stay Away From Lonely Places," "Hey Pretty Lady," "So You Think You're a Cowboy," "Silver (The Hunger)," "Bobby McGee," "Tequila after Midnight," and various untitled lyrics |
| 1 | 3 | Sheet music of songs by Jesse Ashlock, Dee Moeller, and Tom Waits, lyrics by Kris Kristofferson and Tom Bahler, correspondence with publishing companies, and lyrics of songs written or collaborated on by Willie before 1972 printed by Pamper Music including: |

And So Will You My Love
Any Old Arms Won't Do
Are You Ever Coming Home
Are You Sure
Both Ends of the Candle
Cold Empty Space
Congratulations (sheet music)
Country Willie
Crazy (sheet music)
Darkness on the Face of the Earth
December Day
Did I Ever Love You
Don't Say Love or Nothing
The End of Understanding
Everything but You
Funny how Time Slips Away
Good Times (sheet music)
Half a Man (sheet music)
Healing Hands of Time (sheet music)

Box Folder

Series I: Works and Performance

Sheet music, before 1972, continued

1	3	Hello Fool Hello Walls (sheet music) Hold Me Tighter Home is where You're Happy Home Motel How Does it Feel I Didn't Sleep a Wink I Don't Feel Anything I Gotta Get Drunk I Just Can't Let You Say Goodbye I Never Cared For You I Should Have Kissed Her More I Want a Girl It's Not For Me to Understand I've Seen All the World I Care to See Jimmy's Road Just For the Moment Kneel at the Feet of Jesus The Local Memory The Message More than One Way to Cry A New Way to Cry One Day at a Time One In a Row Our Love of Yesterday Pages Permanently Lonely Pretty Paper (sheet music) She Always Comes Back to Me Sometimes She Lies Sorrow Tearing Me Apart
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1	4	Sheet music to songs that Willie wrote or collaborated on:
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Any Old Arms Won't Do
Are You Ever Coming Home
Are You Sure
Both Ends of the Candle
Cold Empty Space
Cry Softly Darling
Darkness on the Face of the Earth
The End of Understanding
Everybody's Baby

Box Folder

Series I: Works and Performance

Sheet music to songs that Willie wrote or collaborated on,
continued

1	4	Face of a Fighter The Ghost Go Away Happiness Lives Next Door Heartaches of a Fool Hello Darling Hello Wall, No. 2 I Can Still Reach Yesterday I Can't Find the Time I Didn't Sleep a Wink I Feel Sorry for Him I Gotta Get Drunk I Just Don't Understand I Just Stopped By I Let My Mind Wander I Want a Girl I Should Have Kissed Her More I Write You Letters In God's Eyes It's not for me to Understand I've Just Destroyed the World (I'm Living In) Just for the Moment Kneel at the Feet of Jesus Let My Heart be Broken Little Things The Local Memory Lonely Little Mansion Mean Old Greyhound Bus The Message Mr. Record Man More Than One Way to Cry One Step Beyond Opportunity to Cry Our Chain of Love Over the Waves The Part Where I Cry Pride Wins Again Ridgetop Sad Songs and Waltzes Save Your Tears She Always Comes Back to Me She Might Call
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Box Folder

Series I: Works and Performance

Sheet music to songs that Willie wrote or collaborated on,
continued

1	4	She's Still Gone Slow Down Old World Some Other Time Sorrow Tearing Me Apart Suffer in Silence Take My Word Talk to Me Thanks Again There's a Way There's Gonna be Love (In My House) There's No Tomorrow in Sight They're All the Same Things to Remember Three Days To Make a Long Story Short (She's Gone) Touch Me Twice the Man Two Different Roads Undo the Right Waiting Time Wanted: One Mother What Do You Think of Her Now Where My House Lives Where Were You Yesterday Who Do I Know in Dallas Within Your Crowd You Left a Long Long Time Ago You'll Always Have Someone You Wouldn't Cross the Street (To Say Goodbye) Your Country Boy
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Lyrics:

Bloody Mary Morning
Blue Rock Montana
Come on Home
Denver
Devil in a Sleeping Bag
The Electric Horseman
The Genuine Healer of Time
Goin' Home
A Good Hearted Woman
Heaven and Hell

Box Folder

Series I: Works and Performance

Sheet music to songs that Willie wrote or collaborated on,

Lyrics, continued

1	4	If You Really Loved Me I'm a Memory Let Me Be a Man Me and Paul No Love Around Phases and Stages Pick Up the Tempo Precious Memories Run Jody Run Shotgun Willie These Are Difficult Times Time of the Preacher Wake me When It's Over What Do You Want Me to Do Where Do You Stand Where's the Snow Why are You Picking on Me Will You Remember You Can't Get There from Here You Ought to Hear me Crying
1	5	"Jimmy's Road," music by Willie Nelson, cassette, video, fax, 1990, n.d.
1	6	Screenplay by Willie Nelson entitled <i>The Man Who Owed Everyone</i>
1	7	Photocopy of <i>The Man Who Owed Everyone</i>
1	8	Screenplay of story by Willie Nelson entitled <i>Write Your Own Songs</i> , final draft, December 18, 1981
1	9	Synopsis of screenplay idea entitled <i>The Lone Star Spangled Banner</i> , 1987
1	10	Songs and fan letters to Willie Nelson, 1977, n.d.
2	1	Letters to Nelson, includes clippings and song books, 1979, 1990, n.d.
2	2	Correspondence from Betty L. Shaughnessy, 1991
2	3	"Family Bible," Willie Nelson and Willie Nelson, Jr., recording information, 1988
2	4	Itineraries, 1982, 1986-1987
2	5	Itineraries, 1986, 1988-1989
2	6	Itineraries, 1990
2	7	Itineraries, 1989-1991

Box Folder

Series I: Works and Performance, continued

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| 2 | 8 | Itineraries, 1991 |
| 3 | 1 | Itineraries, 1992-1993 |
| 3 | 2 | Itineraries, 1993-1994 |

Series II: Publicity, 1975-1992, n.d.

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| 3 | 3 | Posters and programs, n.d. |
| 3 | 4 | 4th of July Picnic, bumper sticker, photos, fliers, press release, clothing, 1979 |
| 3 | 5 | Films, <i>Honeysuckle Rose</i> (photos, pamphlet, clippings), <i>Barbarosa</i> (press release, production notes, photos), 1980-1981 |
| 3 | 6 | Concerts, newsletter (1978), photos (n.d.), reviews (1976) |
| 3 | 7 | Promotional Materials, includes buttons, concert tickets, fliers, backstage passes, 1979, n.d. |
| 3 | 8 | Magazine articles, <i>People</i> (May 1976) and <i>Playboy</i> (November 1976) |
| 3 | 9 | Magazine articles, <i>Texas Monthly</i> (September 1975 and August 1976), <i>Country Music</i> (February 1976), <i>Esquire</i> (August 1981), and <i>Texas Music</i> (May 1976) |
| 3 | 10 | Magazine articles, <i>Texas Monthly</i> (December 1976) and <i>Country Music</i> (June 1977) |
| 4 | 1 | Magazine articles, <i>Austin Homes and Gardens</i> (October 1981) and <i>3rd Coast</i> (September 1986) |
| 4 | 2 | Clippings, 1976-1979, 1983-1984, 1987-1992 |

Series III: Awards, 1986

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| 4 | 3 | Program and correspondence relating to the Music Industry Division of the United Jewish Appeal, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York dinner honoring Willie Nelson, November 1, 1986 |
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Series IV: Personal, n.d.

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| 4 | 4 | Memorabilia, includes sunglasses, joint roaches, belt buckle, photos, bandana, pins, running shoes, golf ball, etc., n.d. |
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Series V: Farm Aid, 1985-1991, n.d.

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| 4 | 5 | Memorabilia, includes badges, buttons, and guitar pick |
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Series V: Farm Aid, continued

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| 4 | 6 | <u>1985</u>

Financial report, correspondence, copies of disbursement checks, press releases, congressional vote record, funding requests, National FFA Foundation Annual Report, and report entitled "Crisis in Rural Oklahoma: A Call for Understanding, Compassion, Justice, and Action" |
| 4 | 7 | <u>1985, continued</u>

Hotline numbers, list of organizations that received disbursements, correspondence, clippings, and Farmers' Guide to FmHA (January 1986) |
| 4 | 8 | <u>1986</u>

Correspondence, Farm Aid fact sheet, summary organizations funded by Farm Aid, Farm Aid, Inc. matching grant program summary (draft), clippings, request for exemption sent to Internal Revenue Service, copies of disbursement checks |
| 4 | 9 | <u>1986, continued</u>

Correspondence, grant applications, memorandum of agreement relating to 1986 concert, ticket proposal from Shamrock Ticket Service, minutes of the organizational meeting of the Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. and the group's articles of incorporation and bylaws |
| 5 | 1 | <u>April-May 1986</u>

Correspondence, financial documents, Farm Aid general program guidelines, press release, newsletters, official proclamation of Departmental sponsorship of Farm Aid II by Jim Hightower, Texas Commissioner of Agriculture, map, event schedule, Farm Aid Congress Statement of Purpose. |
| 5 | 2 | <u>June 1986</u>

Cassette, correspondence, Farm Aid contents memo, National Farmers and Ranchers Congress audio script, financial documents, bumper stickers, performer list for Farm Aid II Concert, Willie Nelson's press schedule, press releases |

Box Folder

Series V: Farm Aid, continued

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| 5 | 3 | <u>July 1986</u>

Correspondence, report on the distribution and use of Farm Aid funds, clippings, Farm Aid stress grid (state level data), press release, United Farmer and Rancher Congress schedule of activities and budget information |
| 5 | 4 | <u>August 1986</u>

Correspondence, copies of disbursement checks, Farm Aid Board of Directors meeting agenda and minutes, Farm Aid stress grid (state level data), "Strengthening the Spirit of America, the 1986 Farm Congress Report," clippings, and a press release. |
| 5 | 5 | Local caucus resolutions recommended to the United Farmers and Rancher Congress, St. Louis Missouri, September 11-13, 1986, includes correspondence |
| 6 | 1 | <u>September-October 1986</u>

Correspondence, clippings, copies of disbursement checks. |
| 6 | 2 | <u>October-November 1986</u>

Correspondence, documents relating to the League of Rural Voters' request to re-broadcast the Farm Aid concert, clippings, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid, and tax documents |
| 6 | 3 | <u>November-December 1986</u>

Grant disbursement information, correspondence, proposal for the development of computer based electronic center for the benefit and use of the farm advocate community throughout the country presented by the Farm Resource Foundation, copies of disbursement checks, and the Farmers' Guide to FDIC. |
| 6 | 4 | December 1986

Correspondence, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid, report entitled "FmHA Farmer Borrowers, New and Complex Problems," and copies of disbursement checks. |

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Series V: Farm Aid, continued

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| 6 | 5 | <u>January-February 1987</u>

Correspondence, press releases, Clearinghouse Review of Poverty Law, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid, report on the distribution of Farm Aid funds, and clippings. |
| 6 | 6 | <u>March 1987</u>

Correspondence, AG-Link Corporation report of activities, financial documents, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid |
| 6 | 7 | <u>April 1987</u>

Farm Aid overview of funded organizations, descriptions of Farm Aid funding categories, donation information (Del Monte Corporation) including copy of \$1,000,000 check, correspondence, copies of disbursement checks, Illinois South Project financial report, and sponsorship information |
| 7 | 1 | <u>May-July 1987</u>

Correspondence, research report prepared by Prairiefire Rural Action, Inc. entitled "The Continuing Crisis in Rural America, Fact vs. Fiction," income statement of Farm Counseling Services, Inc., newsletters, rejection letters, plans and contracts concerning Farm Aid II concert, Farmers' Legal Action Group Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid, memo concerning Coleman v. Lyng national class action suit, and copies of disbursement checks. |
| 7 | 2 | <u>July-August 1987</u>

Clippings, correspondence, transcript of the testimony of Mona Lee Brock on behalf of the Oklahoma AG-Link hotline and Oklahoma Conference of Churches before the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, July 29, 1987 along with other documents relating to those organizations, press releases, information about fall 1987 concert in Lincoln, Nebraska, newsletters, copies of disbursement checks. |

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Series V: Farm Aid, continued

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| 7 | 3 | <p><u>November-December 1987</u></p> <p>Rejection letters, newsletters, copies of disbursement checks, correspondence, clippings, minutes from AG-Link Hotline Board of Directors meeting, transcript of the testimony of Dr. Max E. Glenn representing the Oklahoma AG-Link Coalition and the Oklahoma Conference of Churches before the National Action Commission on the Mental Health of Rural Americans, Des Moines, Iowa, December 2, 1987, and a sampling of work funded by Farm Aid.</p> |
| 7 | 4 | <p>Farm Aid, Inc., Annual Report, 4 September 1986 through 30 June 1987</p> |
| 7 | 5 | <p><u>January-March 1988</u></p> <p>Correspondence, clippings, newsletters, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid, rejection letters.</p> |
| 7 | 6 | <p><u>April-August 1988</u></p> <p>Rejection letters, directory of organizations funded by Farm Aid, clippings, records of grants approved, and newsletters.</p> |
| 7 | 7 | <p><u>September-December 1988</u></p> <p>Records of approved grants, newsletters, rejection letters, press releases, "Shadows on the Land: A Special Report on America's Hazardous Harvest," by Texans United and National Toxics Campaign and other documents related to the organizations, statements by Willie Nelson about allegations against Farm Aid's use of funds, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid, clippings, and copies of disbursement checks.</p> |
| 7 | 8 | <p>Correspondence, clippings, and proposal abstract related to the National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards, n.d.</p> |
| 8 | 1 | <p>Correspondence, newsletters, rejection letters, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Final Report (1989), list of organizations receiving Farm Aid grants (June 8, 1990)</p> |

Box Folder

Series V: Farm Aid, continued

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| 8 | 2 | Documents from annual meeting of Farm Aid's Board of Directors (April 20, 1991), Farm Aid, Inc. Report on Internal Control Structure (December 31, 1990), Financial Statements for December 31, 1990 and 1989, proposed amendment to bylaws, tax documents. |
| 8 | 3 | Farm Aid IV shooting script, 1990 |
| 8 | 4 | Farm Aid IV shooting script continued and United Farmer and Rancher Congress, 1986 (five videotapes) |

Series VI: IRS Penalties

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| 8 | 5 | Statement of financial condition (1984) and IRS sealed bid sales of Nelson's property including maps and descriptions of the property (1991) |
| 8 | 6 | Clippings, 1990-1991 |