



The Wittliff Collections

Guide to the Willie Nelson Collection

1975-1994

Collection SWWC-021

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Nelson, Willie, 1933-
Title:	Guide to the Willie Nelson Collection
Dates:	1975-1994
Abstract:	This collection documents Willie Nelson's career in music, especially as a lyricist and a performing artist. The early years of Farm Aid are also well-documented.
Identification:	SWWC-021
Extent:	4 Linear Feet, 8 boxes (Plus oversize material.)
Language:	English
Repository:	The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University

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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

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).

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

Open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Materials from the Wittliff Collections are made available for use in research, teaching, and private study. The user assumes responsibility for determining copyright status, obtaining permission to publish, and abiding by U.S. copyright laws.

<https://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/visit/policies/publication.html>

Immediate Source of Acquisition

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

Preferred Citation

Willie Nelson Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University

Physical Location

Materials may be stored off-site. Advance notice is required for use:

<https://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu/research/makearesearchappointment.html>.

Related Materials

See also: the Bill Wittliff Papers 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.

Controlled Access Headings

- Concerts
- Country music
- Music -- Texas
- Musicians -- Texas
- Popular music -- Writing and publishing

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Works and Performance, 1977-1994, undated

Box	Folder	
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, 1977-1994, undated
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, 1977-1994, undated
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 , 1972
		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)
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 YouI 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

1 4 Sheet music to songs that Willie wrote or collaborated on , undated

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

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

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

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

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, undated
1	6	Screenplay by Willie Nelson entitled The Man Who Owed Everyone, undated
1	7	Photocopy of The Man Who Owed Everyone, undated
1	8	Screenplay of story by Willie Nelson entitled Write Your Own Songs, final draft, December 18, 1981
1	9	Synopsis of screenplay idea entitled The Lone Star Spangled Banner, 1987
1	10	Songs and fan letters to Willie Nelson, 1977, undated
2	1	Letters to Nelson, includes clippings and song books, 1979, 1990, undated
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
2	8	Itineraries, 1991
3	1	Itineraries, 1992-1993
3	2	Itineraries, 1993-1994

Series II: Publicity , 1975-1992, undated

3	3	Posters and programs, undated
3	4	4th of July Picnic, bumper sticker, photos, fliers, press release, clothing, 1979
3	5	Films, Honeysuckle Rose (photos, pamphlet, clippings), Barbarosa (press release, production notes, photos), 1980-1981
3	6	Concerts, newsletter, photos, reviews , 1976, 1978, undated
3	7	Promotional Materials, includes buttons, concert tickets, fliers, backstage passes, 1979, undated
3	8	Magazine articles, People and Playboy, 1976
3	9	Magazine articles, Texas Monthly, Country Music, Esquire, and Texas Music, 1975-1981
3	10	Magazine articles, Texas Monthly and Country Music , 1976-1977
4	1	Magazine articles, Austin Homes and Gardens and 3rd Coast, 1981, 1986
4	2	Clippings, 1976-1992

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 |
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Series IV: Personal, undated

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

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| 4 | 5 | Memorabilia, includes badges, buttons, and guitar pick, undated |
| 4 | 6 | 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", 1985 |
| 4 | 7 | Hotline numbers, list of organizations that received disbursements, correspondence, clippings, and Farmers' Guide to FmHA (January 1986), 1985 |
| 4 | 8 | 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, 1986 |
| 4 | 9 | 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 , 1986 |
| 5 | 1 | 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, April-May 1986 |
| 5 | 2 | 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, June 1986 |
| 5 | 3 | 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, July 1986 |
| 5 | 4 | 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., August 1986 |
| 5 | 5 | Local caucus resolutions recommended to the United Farmers and Rancher Congress, St. Louis Missouri, September 11-13, 1986, includes correspondence, August 1986 |
| 6 | 1 | Correspondence, clippings, copies of disbursement checks, September-October 1986 |
| 6 | 2 | 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, October-November 1986
6	3	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, November-December 1986
6	4	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., December 1986
6	5	January-February 1987: 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, January-February 1987
6	6	Correspondence, AG-Link Corporation report of activities, financial documents, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid, March 1987
6	7	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, April 1987
7	1	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, May-July 1987
7	2	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, July-August 1987
7	3	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, November-December 1987
7	4	Farm Aid, Inc., Annual Report, 1987
7	5	Correspondence, clippings, newsletters, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Quarterly Report to Farm Aid, rejection letters, January-March 1988
7	6	Rejection letters, directory of organizations funded by Farm Aid, clippings, records of grants approved, and newsletters, April-August 1988
7	7	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, September-December 1988
7	8	Correspondence, clippings, and proposal abstract related to the National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards, undated
8	1	Correspondence, newsletters, rejection letters, Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. Final Report, list of organizations receiving Farm Aid grants, 1988-1989

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| 8 | 2 | Documents from annual meeting of Farm Aid's Board of Directors, Farm Aid, Inc. Report on Internal Control Structure , Financial Statements, proposed amendment to bylaws, tax documents, 1989-1991 |
| 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), 1986, 1990 |

Series VI: IRS Penalties, 1984-1991

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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), 1984, 1991 |
| 8 | 6 | Clippings, 1990-1991 |