Bonita Museum and Cultural Center
4355 Bonita Road
Bonita, CA 91902
https://www.bonitahistoricalsociety.org/

Overview

Collection Title: Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District collection

Name of Creators: Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District, Richard Yokley

Date(s): circa 1950-2022

Extent: 3 linear feet of boxed papers and small artifacts, 6 oversized folders in map drawer, 1 4-foot tube for oversized maps, several large artifacts unboxed.

Language of Material: English

Arrangement: Arranged mostly by format and size; time capsule in a separate series.

Summary: Collection consists of photographs, negatives, correspondence, newspapers, scrapbooks, campaign posters, artifacts, architectural drawings, fire protection maps, newsletters and other papers and ephemera documenting the history of fire protection in Bonita, California from circa 1950-2022.

Collection Details

Administrative History: Sweetwater Valley fire protection began with a volunteer group that would be called by the bell at the Sweetwater Fruit Company boarding house and use a repurposed fruit sprayer truck to spray water. In 1950 the Upper Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Department was organized, with Don Herron as the first fire chief aided by 15 volunteers.

The fruit company donated half an acre, and through donated labor and fundraising the first fire station was finished at 4035 Bonita Road in 1951. In 1952, by vote of the people, the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District was formed, supported by tax funds instead of donations and voluntary subscriptions. In 1955 James W. Jones became the first paid Fire Chief. The fire station building was expanded in the 1960s. Slowly more full-time firefighters were hired, eventually ending the volunteer program by the end of 1968. By 1971 the district had a chief, secretary, and 10 personnel.

In 1974 the district leased the land for a second fire station at 4940 Bonita Road, officially dedicated on October 6, 1974. Fire headquarters remained at station 1. The district later

bought the property. In 1991 plans were made to build a bigger fire station on the site of station 2. Firefighters moved back to station 1 during construction. Dedication and grand opening for the new station was held on September 16, 1992. In January 1993, the old station 1 was turned over to be the new home of the Bonita Museum.

For a more detailed and comprehensive history, including lists of past volunteers, employees, and fire chiefs, see box 1, folders 19-22, *Story of Fire Protection in Sweetwater Valley* by Richard Yokley.

Scope and Contents: Collection consists of artifacts, photographs, negatives, correspondence, newspapers, scrapbooks, campaign posters, architectural drawings, fire protection maps, newsletters and other papers and ephemera documenting the history of fire protection in Bonita from circa 1950-2022. Notable items include two sets of firefighter turnout gear circa 1990s, architectural drawings of the 1951 fire station, a comprehensive fire protection history written by Richard Yokley, and the contents of the time capsule created when the fire station was dedicated in 1992, opened in 2022.

Provenance: This is an artificial collection. Some items have donor forms; many do not. The container and series lists show any accession numbers known, which are sometimes linked to donor names. Richard Yokley, a firefighter in Bonita from 1972-1999, is the donor of some material. The time capsule series is believed to be given to the museum by the Fire Protection District shortly after it was opened in 2022.

Subject Headings

Fire protection districts
Fire departments--California—History
Historic buildings--California—Bonita
Bonita (Calif.)--History
Yokley, Richard

Administrative Information

Access: The collection is open for research use.

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Finding Aids: 1992 Time Capsule Inventory, box 4, folder 1

Citation: [Title], [Date]. Box [X], Folder [X], Bonita Sunnyside Fire Protection District Collection, Bonita Museum and Cultural Center, Bonita, California.

Processing Information: Some binders and scrapbook covers were discarded during processing, see notes in series and container lists.

Finding Aid Creation: Sarah Lewis, 2026 June. Source used in writing administrative history: Yokley, Richard. *Story of Fire Protection in Sweetwater Valley*, 2012. Copies in box 1, folders 19-22.

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Contents of Collection

See the attached series list and container list for a more detailed list of materials and locations.

Series Name: Papers and Photographs

Scope and Content: Photographs, negatives, correspondence, a photo album, newsletters and other papers and ephemera. Includes several versions of *Story of Fire Protection in the Sweetwater Valley* by Richard Yokley.

Series Name: Oversized Papers

Scope and Content: 1951 scrapbook, 1974 photo album, architectural drawings from 1951 and 1964, Bonita fire station irrigation and planting plans, 1991, and several fire district related campaign posters.

Series Name: Artifacts

Scope and Content: Fire department branded mugs, pins, badges and other small items. Large artifacts include two sets of turnout gear, status board, wooden union sign and “No Parking” sign from the original fire station.

Series Name: Time Capsule, 1992

Scope and Content: Papers, newspapers and small artifacts gathered from schools, businesses, churches and community organizations in 1992, sealed in celebration of the opening of the fire station. Also includes newspaper articles surrounding the opening of the time capsule in 2022. See inventory in box 4, folder 1.

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