



CENTER FOR ART + ENVIRONMENT at the Nevada Museum of Art

Bill Stapleton: Burning Man, A Slice of Life

Collection CAE1805

Introduction/Abstract

The Texaco Station of Gerlach, owned by Bruno Selmi, was managed by Bill Stapleton. Bill provided knowledge about the latest news and information about the conditions on the playa. Materials include photographs of the event from 1994 to 2007 with several missing years.

Biographical Note: Bill Stapleton

Bill Stapleton moved to Gerlach in 1983. He worked as the manager for the Texaco Station owned by Bruno Selmi. He attended Burning Man multiple years.

Scope and Content

Burning Man is “an annual art event and temporary community based on radical self-expression and self-reliance,” according to its website. The festival is held annually during the last week of August on the Black Rock Desert playa one hundred miles north of Reno. Attendance has grown from the low hundreds in the early 1990s to more than 70,000 in 2017.

The roots of the event began with the burning of figures on the summer solstice by sculptor Mary Grauberger on San Francisco’s Baker Beach in 1986. In 1986 Harvey and his friend Jerry James erected an 8-foot tall wooden figure. In 1990 the then 40-foot figure was drawing so many attendees for the burning of “The Man” that police outlawed the event. A separate event had been planned by members of the Cacophony Society on the Black Rock Desert for that year, “Zone Trip #4, A Bad Day at Black Rock,” which was billed as a dadaist and situationist performance happening. Harvey joined forces with the Cacophony Society and the first burn of the Man was held on the playa in 1990.

The last stop for groceries, a hot meal, or gassing up before entering the event was Gerlach. The Texaco Station of Gerlach, owned by Bruno Selmi, was managed by Bill Stapleton. Bill was a wealth of knowledge about the latest news and gossip around town as well as providing information about the conditions on the playa. Materials include photographs of the event from 1994 to 2007 with several missing years.

This archive is currently in process.