Finding Aid to the Charles B. Polhemus Papers, 1858-1916

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University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, California, 94720-6000
Phone: (510) 642-6481
Fax: (510) 642-7589
Email: bancref@library.berkeley.edu
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Note
History --History, California --History, Bay AreaGeographical (By Place) --California --Bay AreaSocial Sciences --Business and Economics
Collection Summary

Collection Title: Charles B. Polhemus Papers,
Date (inclusive): 1858-1916
Collection Number: BANC MSS 91/17 c
Collector: Polhemus, Charles B.
Extent: Number of containers: 5 boxes, 2 cartons
Linear feet: 4.6
Repository: The Bancroft Library
Berkeley, California 94720-6000
Physical Location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.
Languages Represented: Collection materials are in English and Spanish
Access
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Charles B. Polhemus papers, BANC MSS 91/17 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Acquisition Information
The Charles B. Polhemus Papers were given to The Bancroft Library on February 12, 1991 by the estate of Irene J. Polhemus.

Biography
Charles B. Polhemus was born in Burlington County, New Jersey on February 10, 1818, to Ann Van Zant of Baltimore and Montgomery Polhemus, a New Jersey merchant and landowner. His paternal grandfather was Major John Polhemus, who served in the Revolutionary Army of 1775 and whose father-in-law, John Hart, was an organizer of the Jersey Blues and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Charles attended school in Burlington County until the age of 12, when he began to learn the drug business, earning a pharmacy diploma within four years.

Charles Polhemus went to South America in February of 1836. He lived in Valparaiso, Guayaquil, Lima, and finally in Payta, serving as a clerk and book-keeper in the commission business, as principal of a business, and as U. S. Consul in Payta for four years. He came to California during the Gold Rush of 1849 and established a branch of Alsop & Co. of New York and South America in San Francisco. Alsop & Co. was one of the largest American banking and commission concerns in South America and Charles continued to work with them for the next 14 years. Between 1850-1860, he also served as the Consul for Chile and Peru in San Francisco. During these years, he lived on Stockton Avenue in a house brought, with 16 others in 1849 or 1850, around the Horn in pieces by Commodore Stockton. In 1852 he married Matilda Murphy, a native of New York. Matilda and Charles had three children: Mary Josephine, George B., and one who died in infancy, followed before 1880 by Matilda.

In 1864, with Donahue and Newhall, Charles became interested in the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad, which they guaranteed and subsequently owned. They built a branch to Gilroy, which required the purchase of Commodore Stockton's ranch of approximately 2,000 acres, some of which was inside the city limits of San Jose. In 1867, Charles sold his interests in the railroad to Stanford, Huntington, Hopkins, & Co., later known as the Southern Pacific Railroad. In that same year, he and three associates purchased land in San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties, which they later sold at great profit.

Charles' own ranch included 110 acres of the original Stockton Ranch, nearly half in the city of San Jose, as well as several ranches in Santa Clara County, totalling nearly 1000 acres. The ranch appears to have become his primary residence sometime after 1860; his diaries record frequent stays at Lick House in the City. Charles died at home on his ranch on June 25, 1904, according to the diary of his son, George.

George B. Polhemus was born in San Francisco on January 21, 1857 and was educated as part of the study group of The Rev. Dr. George Burrows, for preparation to enter Cambridge University. He did not complete his studies. Instead, in 1884, George purchased the Cerro Alegre Rancho, an 805 acre ranch near the S.P.R.R.'s Coyote Station. In addition, he leased 3,300 acres on which he raised Ayrshires, Shorthorns, Jerseys, Holsteins, and Holstein-Freesian cattle and thoroughbred horses. Although chosen by the Republican convention in 1886 to run for state assembly, he was defeated and showed no further political ambitions. George married Jennie Ryder, daughter of George W. Ryder of Santa Clara Valley in January 1887. His diary records the 8th birthday of a son, Charles B. Polhemus, Jr. [born November 27, 1888].

Obtained primarily from Pen Pictures from the Garden of the World, or Santa Clara County, California, 1888

Scope and Content
Charles B. Polhemus came to California in 1849 and was an active and successful businessman and diplomat, with interests in real estate, the commission and banking business, ranching, and the railroad industry. This collection consists of retained copies of correspondence, diaries, and business records of Charles B. Polhemus and his son George.

Series 1, Correspondence (Outgoing), 1864-1897, gives a long record of those to whom Charles wrote in his various capacities, both as a business and family man, and in his continued role as Consul for Chile in San Francisco.

In Series 2, Charles' diaries record in some detail his daily life and activities as a rancher in the Santa Clara Valley, while also giving evidence of his involvement with the developing business of agriculture, land, and property rights in California, including legislation concerning these issues. Much of his time was spent "calling on" bankers and various other concerns, both in San Francisco and in Santa Clara County. His family life is also recorded in these daily entries. One cousin often mentioned, Henry D. Polhemus (born in Valparaiso, Chile), served as station agent for the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad and eventually settled in Marin County as an agent for the North Pacific Coast Railroad.

The two diaries kept by George B. Polhemus (Series 6) record only briefly his daily activities. It is in the farming journals that appear to follow that may be found the detailed entries reminiscent of his father's diaries. A predominant concern throughout George's journals was water and water rights.
The agricultural and business records of both Charles and George Polhemus, found in Series 3, 4, 5, and 6, give in even further detail an accounting of their activities in Santa Clara County.

**Boxes 1-2**

**SERIES 1: CORRESPONDENCE (OUTGOING) IN LETTERPRESS COPYBOOKS, 1864-1897.**

*Scope and Content Note*

Six volumes of letterpress copybooks, chronologically arranged. Contains copies of personal, family, and business letters sent by Charles B. Polhemus and written from San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Mt. Holly, New Jersey. The last volume contains many letters written from College Park, the site of the former College of the Pacific, located within the current boundaries of San Jose. A number of letters are in Spanish and were sent from Polhemus in his capacity as Consul of Chile in San Francisco. Some volumes are indexed.

- **Box 1, folder 1** Sept. 22, 1864-Feb. 22, 1871
- **folder 2** March 1, 1871-Sept. 13, 1874
- **folder 3** Oct. 4, 1874-April 21, 1878
- **folder 4** April 26, 1878-Aug. 7, 1882
- **Box 2, folder 1** April 20, 1888-[May 8, 1892]
- **folder 2** March 26, 1894-July 20, 1897

**Box 3**

**SERIES 2: DIARIES, 1873-1878.**

*Scope and Content Note*

Yearly journals, in which daily entries record weather and personal, family, and business activities, including dealings with prominent business and political figures, both in California and in Washington, D.C. The 1876 volume includes an account of his visit to Centennial Hall in Philadelphia. Printed prefatory pages in some volumes provide a schedule of San Francisco fire alarms and hack fare, as well as an almanac.

- **Box 3, folder 1** 1873
- **folder 2** 1874
- **folder 3** 1875
- **folder 4** 1876
- **folder 5** 1877
- **folder 6** 1878

**Box 4, folders 1-6**

**SERIES 3: AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS RECORDS, 1868-1897.**

*Scope and Content Note*

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

Account and record books, primarily concerning horses and cattle. Includes records of animals bought and sold, registry applications and breeding, births, deaths, shoeing, pasturage and stabling accounts, and expenses for hay, grain, and farm supplies, as well as entries for the county fair. There is one ledger of employees for the years 1868-1889.

- **Box 4, folder 1** Labor: ledger of employees 1868-1889
- **folder 2** C. B. Polhemus: horse stable accounts and record of cows bred 1871-1885
- **folder 3** Horses and Cattle: accounts 1873-1887
- **folder 4** Registry applications and breeding records for cattle 1884-1894
- **folder 5** C. B. Polhemus: bull services 1886-1890
- **folder 6** Pasturage: records of accounts paid; record of breeding and hay bought 1892-1897

**Box 4, folders 7-8**

**SERIES 4: LAND RECORDS, 1864-1891.**

*Scope and Content Note*

Includes two miscellaneous items: abstract of title of land belonging to Charles B. Polhemus and later, a schedule of prices and terms for tracts sold.
Abstract of title to tracts of land belonging to C. B. Polhemus, Esq., in the Pulgas Rancho, as recorded in the city and county of San Francisco Dec. 15, 1864
Schedule of prices and terms, Hyde Park Lots, C. B. Polhemus; also, Fair Oaks Station, Menlo Park Tract Sept. 1889; June 27, 1891

SERIES 5: FINANCIAL RECORDS, 1858-1901.

Scope and Content Note
Personal, family, and business account records, including cash books, day books, a journal ledger, and miscellaneous records of accounts for properties.

CASH BOOKS

Ctn. 1, folder 1
October 1858-July 1865

folder 2
August 1865-May 1871

folder 3
June 1871-July 1876

folder 4
July 1876-April 1881

folder 5
April 1881-July 1886

folder 6
August 1886-June 1891

folder 7
July 1891-July 1901

DAY BOOKS

Ctn. 1, folder 8
January 1871-June 1872

folder 9
January 1875-May 1877

folder 10
May 1877-August 1880

Ctn. 2, folder 1
August 1880-August 1883

folder 2
August 1883-June 1886

folder 3
June 1886-January 1888

folder 4
January 1888-October 1889

folder 5
November 1889-July 1892

JOURNAL LEDGER

Ctn. 2, folder 6
September 1858-December 1898

MISCELLANEOUS

Ctn. 2, folder 7
Letterpress book of statements of accounts for properties & stables 1863-1883

folder 8
Piojo Ranch Account Oct.1865-Jan.1876

Box 5, Carton 2, folder 9-11

Scope and Content Note
Arranged in sub-series by format, and then chronologically. Includes diaries, farming journals, and financial records. The two early diaries briefly record his daily activities and appear to be continued and replaced by the farming journals that begin in 1899. In these are found the daily record of weather and work done on his ranches (complete with subject categorization in the margins), including crops and livestock raised, supplies bought, workers hired, visitors, and travels. The financial records are an incomplete set of cash and day books.

DIARIES, 1895-1896

Box 5, folder 1
1895

folder 2
1896
### FARMING JOURNALS, 1899-1905

**Farming and Crops, Coyote, Cal.:**

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<td>4</td>
<td>Book No. 3, Sept. 5, 1900-April 23, 1902 1900-1902</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Book No. 4, April 23, 1902-Sept. 8, 1902 1902</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Book No. 5, Holstein Freesian Herd, Sept. 8, 1902-March 24, 1903 1902-1903</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Book No. 6, Labor Diary, April 1, 1903-April 24, 1905 1903-1905</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Book No. 7, May 4, 1905-Oct. 8, 1905 1905</td>
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### FINANCIAL RECORDS, 1887-1916

**Cash Books**

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<td>November 1894-May 1898 (p. 1-49: closed); (p. 50- ) is used as 1916 check record book</td>
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**Day Book**

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<td>July 1890-November 1899</td>
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### SERIES 7: MISCELLANEOUS, undated

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains clippings and notes, loose and removed from volumes.

**Clippings and notes, loose and removed from volumes**