Finding Aid to the Frederick W. Dohrmann Family Papers, 1896-1936

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Collection number: BANC MSS 91/29 c

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Collection Summary
Collection Title: Frederick W. Dohrmann Family Papers,
Date (inclusive): 1896-1936
Collection Number: BANC MSS 91/29 c
Collector: Dohrmann, F. (Frederick)
Extent: Number of containers: 3 cartons, 1 oversize folder, and 1 oversize volume.Linear feet: 3.75
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.

Abstract: Collection contains incomplete corporate records from various companies the Dorhmanns were involved in; containing portions of each company’s and Mr. Dorhmann’s personal records relating to his business interests. These early California department store companies reflect San Francisco business history and the management and personnel tensions of the day. Collection includes a commemorative scrapbook documenting F.W. Dohrmann’s career.

Languages Represented: Collection materials are in English and German

Access
Collection is open for research.

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holder, which must also be obtained by the reader.

**Preferred Citation**
[Identification of item], F. W. Dohrmann family papers, BANC MSS 91/29 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

**Title**: Dohrmann Family Papers, 1914-1915,

**Identifier/Call Number**: BANC MSS 79/22 c

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Photographs have been transferred to Pictorial Collections of The Bancroft Library.

**Acquisition Information**
The F. W. Dohrmann Family Papers were donated to The Bancroft Library in two installments, on May 15 and July 5, 1991, by Mrs. Ava Jean Brumbaum.

**Biography**
Frederick W. Dohrmann was born in Germany in 1842 and came to Davenport, Iowa in 1858. In April of 1862, he settled in San Francisco where he worked as a clerk in a grocery store located at Fifth and Howard. He became involved in the general merchandise business in Oakland and in the manufacturing of breakfast foods.

In 1868, Mr. Dohrmann gave up the milling business and entered into a partnership with Bernard Nathan of B. Nathan Company, engaged in the selling of fine crockery. From this organization, in 1887, evolved Nathan, Dohrmann & Company. At the helm were Mr. B. Nathan, who spent most of his time abroad scouting suppliers of fine china, and Mr. Dohrmann, who remained as manager in San Francisco. The Dohrmann Commercial Company, with Mr. Dohrmann serving as president, appears to be contemporaneous with the Nathan Dohrmann Company. In 1898, Mr. Dohrmann's son, A. B. C. Dohrmann, became a partner in the Nathan Dohrmann Company. From this time forward, he was closely connected with and played an important role in the various Dohrmann stores.

The Emporium, the first department store in California, was founded in 1896. It operated for a year as a group of individually-owned shops in a building owned by the Parrott estate. However, in 1897, due to difficulties ensuing from the lack of centralized management, the Emporium merged with the Golden Rule Bazaar, becoming the Emporium and Golden Rule Bazaar. In 1898, Mr. Dohrmann's son, A. B. C. Dohrmann became officially involved in Mr. Dohrmann, along with others, was instrumental in the reorganization of the new Emporium and was president of the company at the time of his death in 1914. In 1927, the Emporium merged with the Oakland store, H.C. Capwell.

Mr. Dohrmann was also one of the organizers of the San Francisco Hotel Company, which operated the St. Francis Hotel, and one of the founders and president of the Merchants' Association. He held a directorship in the Savings Union Bank and Trust Company of San Francisco and served, at various times, as a director for several of the Dohrmann Commercial Company's syndicate stores.

In addition, Mr. Dohrmann was involved in a number of civic activities, including serving as a member of the Park Commission and as a University of California regent. He worked in the Relief and Red Cross effort at the time of the San Francisco 1906 earthquake and fire, and was deeply interested in the Red Cross Society, the German Benevolent Society and the German Altenheim and served in a number of capacities on various charitable committees.

**Scope and Content**
The Frederick W. Dohrmann Family Papers contain materials from Mr. F. W. Dohrmann's personal files and consist of materials remaining after family members retained various items of personal interest. As a result, the records are spotty and incomplete, with the collection containing only a portion of each company's and Mr. Dohrmann's personal records. These consist of correspondence, memoranda, meeting announcements (nearly all addressed to either Mr. F. W. or his son, A. B. C., Dohrmann), minutes, legal agreements, financial records and reports, inventory and supplier notebooks, personal papers, printed ephemera, and clippings.

The collection contains files of interest to researchers of San Francisco business history and includes records documenting the origin and various reorganizations of the Emporium, California's first department store. The records document the several crises experienced by the fledgling department store, including a dispute between the departments and the Emporium over the sharing of expenses and the difficulties of defining management responsibilities and fair compensation. Also of interest are numerous files pertaining to personnel matters, specifically related to women employees and their compensation and opportunities for growth in the Emporium where, prior to 1911, there were only male sales clerks.

The collection has been arranged, as nearly as possible, to duplicate Mr. Dohrmann's arrangement which was largely subject oriented. In addition, an effort has been made to identify the company to which the records pertain. This has presented certain difficulties since both Mr. Dohrmann and his sons, A. B. C. and F. W. Jr., served simultaneously in numerous capacities at a number of the companies. In fact, this is also the case with a number of the other key employees,
with fathers and sons and brothers often engaged, in some fashion, in the same area of business. It should be noted that correspondence for which there is an index or on which can be found pencilled notations, indicating an order or an arrangement, has been kept together, despite differences in salutation and address, suggesting that the material had been addressed to Mr. F. W. or A. B. C. Dohrmann in their varying roles.

Series 1: Emporium Files, 1869-1933.

Arrangement

Encompassing the greatest bulk of the collection, this series includes correspondence and memoranda, meeting announcements, financial records, printed material, and clippings which document the Emporium's various mergers and reorganizations as well as personnel and other business matters. These have been divided into six sub-series: Board of Managers/Directors, Correspondence and Memoranda, Subject Files, Stock and Stockholders Records, Financial Records, and Miscellaneous. The chronological, correspondence and Emporium and H.C. Capwell merger files were A. B. C. Dohrmann’s.

Board of Managers/Directors Records, ca.1895-1926

Ctn. 1, folder 1

Meeting announcements 1896-97

Special meeting announcements 1913-26

Synopses of Board meetings 1896

Circular letters 1896

Committees of the Board 1896

Finance committee 1896-97

Prospectus, Plan of Operation ca. 1895

Management Force listing 1899-1908

Correspondence and Memoranda, 1895-1930

Ctn. 1, folder 10

Correspondence and notes 1895-96

Notes and memoranda re departments 1896

Chronological files 1925-30

Miscellaneous correspondence 1911-26

Subject Files, 1895-1927

Ctn. 1, folder 20-22

Morton Brothers Suit 1895-97

Emporium Tenants meeting minutes 1896

Department Owners’ Association meeting announcements 1896-97

Expenses and reorganization 1896-98

Emporium and Golden Rule Bazaar merger 1896-98

General and Merchandise Managers miscellaneous 1905-13

Mr. Schlesinger’s talks 1909-10

Leases and property 1896-1927

Personnel 1910-13

Emporium and H.C. Capwell merger 1925-27

Stock & Stockholders Records, 1908-1933

Ctn. 1, folder 57

Correspondence 1917
Series 1: Emporium Files, 1869-1933.
Stock & Stockholders Records, 1908-1933

folder 58 Notice of special meeting 1917
folder 59 Annual meeting announcements 1926-33
folder 60 List of stockholders undated
folder 61-63 Miscellaneous 1908-27

Financial Records, 1869-1914

Ctn. 1, folder 64 Cost and Profit Chart 1896
folder 65 Accounts and Sales Records by department 1869-97
folder 66 Totals and Averages 1896-97
folder 67 Monthly Reports 1909-11
folder 68 Sales Report 1914

Miscellaneous, 1896-1921

Ctn. 1, folder 69 Printed material by F. W. Dohrmann 1897
folder 70 Holiday Reports 1915
folder 71-72 Clippings 1896-1921
Carton 2, folders Series 2: Emporium Capwell Corporation Files, 1913-1937
1-20 Scope and Content Note
Arranged hierarchically in three sub-series, consisting mostly of meeting announcements,
and printed annual and quarterly reports. Also includes some correspondence pertaining to
stockholders and the corporate structure, clippings, and printed material on the Oakland
Capwell store.

Administrative Records, 1913-1936

Ctn. 2, folder 1-2 Board of Directors meeting announcements 1913-29
folder 3 General Executive Board meeting announcements 1929
folder 4 Subsidiaries of Emporium Capwell Corporation annual meeting announcements
1929
folder 5 Syndicate Managers meeting announcement 1929
folder 6-8 Finance Committee meeting announcements 1928-29
folder 9-10 Stockholders meeting announcements 1928-36

Financial Records, 1931-1937

Ctn. 2, folder 11 Annual Reports 1931-37
folder 12 Quarterly Reports 1935-36

Miscellaneous, 1927-1937

Ctn. 2, Correspondence 1930
folder 13-14
folder 15-18 Clippings 1927
folder 19-20 Printed Material 1929-37
Series 3: Nathan Dohrmann Company Files, 1869-1921

Scope and Content Note
Arranged hierarchically. The first sub-series, Administrative Records, contains early partnership papers of Bernard Nathan, F. W. Dohrmann, and A. B. C. Dohrmann, with various memoranda written by F. W. Dohrmann in his role as President. Correspondence files, detailing a dispute between Nathan Dohrmann and the Emporium and Golden Rule Bazaar, include a memo detailing the executive organization of the company and notes about its reorganization. Early financial records and ledgers are found in the second sub-series, with personnel forms and inventory notebooks. Advertisements are found in Oversize folder 1.

Administrative Records, 1887-1910

Ctn. 2, folder 21-22
Partnership Papers 1887-98
folder 23-27
President's Letters 1908-10
folder 28-30
Plans & Problems Memos 1905
folder 31-35
Correspondence 1895-1909

Financial Records, 1869-1907

Ctn. 2, folder 36-37
Annual Balances 1886-99
folder 38
Appendices to Analysis and Review 1903-07
folder 39
Table of Sales 1869-1900
folder 40
Table of Profit and Loss 1869-92
folder 41
Percentage of Sales Estimated as Gross Profits 1900-03
folder 42
Increase and Decrease of Purchases, Sales and Expenses 1888-91
folder 43
Business Statistics 1869-98
folder 44-45
Cash Sales Comparison 1883-97
folder 46
Disbursements Ledgers 1898
folder 47
Profit and Loss Ledger 1869-90

Miscellaneous, 1910-1921 & undated

Ctn. 2, folder 48
Inventory Notebook undated
folder 49
Personnel Forms 1910-21
Carton 2, folders 50-65
Series 4: Dohrmann Commercial Company Files, 1869-1936
Scope and Content Note
Arranged hierarchically in three sub-series containing memoranda and correspondence written by F. W. Dohrmann, in his capacity as president of the company, to A. B. C. Dohrmann, vice-president. Also includes financial correspondence and records, including a comparison of syndicate stores, and invitations and menus for company anniversary dinners.

General Correspondence, 1879-1934 & undated

Ctn. 2, folder 50-51
Correspondence 1910-34
folder 52
To the Hotel Department 1909
folder 53
Company history 1879, undated
folder 54
Report on Trip to Sacramento undated

Financial Correspondence and Records, 1869-1935
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ctn. 2, folder 55-56</th>
<th>Correspondence and reports 1907-09</th>
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<tr>
<td>folder 57</td>
<td>Stock correspondence 1917-18</td>
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<td>folder 58</td>
<td>Tax correspondence 1917-19</td>
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<td>folder 59</td>
<td>Comparison of syndicate stores 1913</td>
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<tr>
<td>folder 60</td>
<td>Financial program memo 1935</td>
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<td>folder 61</td>
<td>Miscellaneous 1869-1913</td>
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<td>folder 64</td>
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<td>folder 65</td>
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<td>Cartons 2, folders 66-68; Carton 3, folders 1-4; Oversize folder 1</td>
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<th>Records Of Syndicate Stores, 1906-1922</th>
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<td>Ctn. 3, folder 5-7</td>
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<td>folder 8-10</td>
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<td>folder 11</td>
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<td>Howell Dohrmann 1907-09</td>
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<td>Parmelee Dohrmann Company 1906-22</td>
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<td>Yost Dohrmann Company [1920?]</td>
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<th>Records Of Unidentified Companies, 1894-1911 &amp; undated</th>
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<td>Miscellaneous correspondence undated</td>
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<td>Inventory book undated</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous financial records 1894-99</td>
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<td>Financial charts 1897-1911</td>
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<td>Christmas donations 1910</td>
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<td>Comparative Building Information undated</td>
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<th>Records of Merchant Associations, 1908-1911 &amp; undated</th>
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<td>Ctn. 3, folder 18</td>
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<td>Retail Merchants of San Francisco 1910-11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Series 6: Files Regarding Related Organizations, 1894-1922
Records of Merchant Associations, 1908-1911 & undated

Folder 19
Merchants' Association 1908
Retail Association of Greater San Francisco undated

Series 7: Personal Papers of F. W. Dohrmann Family, 1841-1938

Scope and Content Note
The bulk of the records in this series consists of items pertaining to F. W. Dohrmann's death and funeral, including obituaries and clippings, lists of clippings and flower arrangements received, as well as estate and personal ledgers, various memos written by F. W. Dohrmann about estate and business planning, and speeches. Also included are a brief biography of A. B. C. Dohrmann, ledgers for the memorial account established in the name of Mr. Dohrmann's deceased son, W. F. Dohrmann, and the papers, including letters of introduction, wills, and passports of various other family members—Josephine (F. W. Dohrmann's wife), Julius Dohrmann (F. W. Dohrmann's father) and Blanca Dohrmann Paulsen (F. W. Dohrmann's sister). Some of the latter records are in German.

Ctn. 3, folder 21
Biography of A. B. C. Dohrmann 1938

Folder 22-23
F. W. Dohrmann memos 1905-06

Folder 24
F. W. Dohrmann Plans and Problems—estate planning 1914

Folder 25
Unitarian Club Dinner Speech 1909

Folder 26-28
Death and Funeral 1914

Folder 29
Obituaries and Clippings 1914-15

Folder 30
Clippings 1900-26

Folder 31
Accounts procedure ledger 1893

Folder 32
Ledger 1911-14

Folder 33
Estate ledger 1914-17

Folder 34-35
W. F. Dohrmann Memorial Account ledgers 1905-15

Folder 36
Beneficiaries of Blanca Dohrmann Paulsen 1928

Folder 37-38
Dohrmann Family personalia 1841-1924

Box Oversize, folder 1
Clippings 1897

Folder v. 1
Advertisements [1869]-1901
Annual Balance sheets 1882-1886

Resolutions of the Merchants' Association upon the Retirement of President F. W. Dohrmann—scrapbook 1901