
Murphy Sabatino Bicycle Racing Collection

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History San Jose Research Library

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Murphy Sabatino Bicycle Racing Collection

Dates: 1936-1980

Collection Number: 2014-9

Creator/Collector: Sabatino, Murphy

Extent: 1.5 linear foot

Repository: History San Jose Research Library

San Jose, California 95112

Abstract: Collection of racing programs, assorted ephemera, news clippings, and photographs related to bicycle racing in San Jose in the late 1930s, six-day bicycle races in San Francisco and other areas in the mid-1950s, and races organized by Sabatino in the early 1950s. Sabatino, an Italian-American born in 1920 in Lawrence, Massachusetts, grew up in San Jose and became a successful real estate entrepreneur. He raced on board tracks in the late 1930s before serving in World War II, and after his return, he built a new velodrome in San Jose and organized races in the 1950s.

Language of Material: English

Access

The collection is available to the public for research by appointment with the Curator of Library & Archives.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

The collection was donated to History San Jose in 2014 by his daughter.

Biography/Administrative History

Murphy Sabatino was born on July 4, 1920, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Later that year, his Italian immigrant family moved to the Berryessa area of San Jose to run an orchard. He attended San Jose High School, where he got caught up in the San Jose bicycle racing craze of the 1930s. "Friday night was bike-racing night in Santa Clara County. That's all you'd hear about - no basketball, no football. We were a big gang and every Sunday we'd get on our bikes and ride over to Santa Cruz on the old highway, picnic for the day and then ride back." (San Jose Mercury News, June 19, 1994). After a series of dirt, cinder and concrete tracks, the Garden City Velodrome -- or Burbank Velodrome -- was built by the Works Progress Administration in 1936 on school property where Lincoln High School now stands. Through the onset of World War II, the 20-race season every summer was "the only show in town," as riders raced sprints, miss-and-outs, and an hourlong team race in front of up to 4000 fans on the eight-mile board track. (San Jose Mercury News, November 8, 1992). After serving in the U.S. Coast Guard during World War II, Sabatino returned to San Jose and formed a highly successful real estate venture "Gem Properties" with former mayor Ernie Renzel and Muirson Label President George Lanlois. He built a board track at the old San Jose Speedway on Cunningham Avenue in the early 1950s, where many riders resumed racing after returning from service, and organized races at this track as well as at tracks in the larger Bay Area. Sabatino was known for his charitable causes, including the Casa Italiano dormitory at Santa Clara University; Sacred Heart Community Center, and Sacred Heart Nativity School. He drafted two successful ballot measures, one in 1990 limiting officeholders to two four-year terms on the San Jose City Council and a 1992 measure doing the same for county supervisors. He also served as foreman of the 1984-85 Santa Clara County grand jury that reviewed the city of San Jose's loss of \$60 million on the bond market. He died September 2001 at the age of 81.

Scope and Content of Collection

Collection of racing programs, clippings scrapbooks, and assorted ephemera related to six-day bicycle races in San Francisco and other areas, and races organized by Sabatino in the early 1950s. Clippings primarily cover 1938-1939 track racing seasons in San Jose, and the six-day races in 1952-1956. The extensive photographs document cyclists throughout multiple decades in San Jose, as well as the San Francisco six-day races and El Paso, Texas, six-day races between 1952 and 1956. Also included are several hand-screened posters advertising races.

Indexing Terms

Bicycle racing

Velodromes

Sabatino, Murphy

Garden City Wheelmen
San Francisco (Calif.)
Oakland (Calif.)
San Jose (Calif.)
Burbank (Calif.)
El Paso (Tex.)
Milwaukee (Wis.)
scrapbooks
clippings (information artifacts)
programs (documents)
magazines (periodicals)
photographic prints
newsletters
posters
cartoons (humorous images)

[Murphy Sabatino Bicycle Racing Collection Box Inventory](#)
