
Guide to the Ernie Renzel Papers

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Ernie Renzel Papers

Date: 1900-2007

Date (bulk): (1953-2004)

Collection number: 2008-29

Creator: Renzel, Ernest H., Jr., 1907-2007

Extent: 6 boxes

Repository: History San Jose Research Library.

San Jose, California 95112-2599

Abstract: Renzel's personal papers, including diplomas, personal and professional certificates, awards, San Jose City records and Santa Clara County public documents. The bulk of the papers relate to Renzel's term as San Jose City Councilman and Mayor, his role in developing the San Jose International Airport and Kelley Park, and his term as Foreman of the Santa Clara County Grand Jury. The collection also includes several personal objects. The collection contains approx. 82 photographs, a DVD movie and a CD-ROM of digital photographs.

Physical location: History San Jose Collection Center

Languages: Collection materials are in English

Access

The Records are available to the public for research by appointment.

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by Renzel's daughter Jenifer Renzel in January 2008, after Renzel's death in 2007. It was accessioned April 2008.

Processing History

Processed by History San Jose staff, 2008-9. The collection was initially inventoried at collection level and rehoused in original folders; later, in October 2009, the collection was organized and catalogued at folder and item level, and rehoused. The documents in the collection were catalogued at folder and item level; photographs were catalogued individually, and records entered into the archives database.

Biographical Note

Ernest (Ernie) H. Renzel, Jr., was born in San Jose on August 7, 1907. His grandfather, Conrad Renzel, was a San Jose baker who expanded his South First Street shop to groceries in the 1860s. Ernie's father, E. H. Renzel, Sr., continued the business, and by the turn of the 20th century was vice president and manager of the Keystone Co., San Jose's first wholesale grocery firm.

Renzel attended San Jose State Normal School and graduated from San Jose High School as president of the student body in 1925. As a member of the Crown and Shield Honor society and athlete, he played for two years on the basketball championship team of the northern coast section and won the Peninsular Athletic league tennis singles championship for San Jose High for two years.

Renzel studied economics and played on the varsity basketball and tennis teams at Stanford University, graduating in 1929. He went on to become President of E. H. Renzel Company Wholesalers. He was married to Emily Hillebrand for 63 years; they had one son and four daughters.

Renzel entered local politics during WWII. In the early 1940s, San Jose City Hall was being run by taxi-service operator Charlie Bigley, widely viewed as a political boss who could always get a majority elected to the San Jose City Council. As a result of two councilmen going to war, six of the seven council seats were left open in the 1944 election. Bigley opposers formed the Progress Committee, and its campaign manager, lawyer Harvey Miller, persuaded Renzel, Al Ruffo and four others into running. Their victory resulted in Renzel's selection as president of the council in 1945. Renzel served one term as unofficial mayor before turning the job over to Ruffo in 1946; by then, Renzel had gotten "Mayor" accepted as the title. One of Renzel's major accomplishments was the San Jose Municipal Airport. Renzel served as Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce Aviation Committee that initiated action to purchase the first tract of land for an airport in 1937. Renzel found the land himself, negotiated a price with the ranch land's owners, and the Committee spearheaded a ballot measure to pay for it. In 1940, as mayor, he exercised an option for the City to purchase 484 acres at \$300 an acre. By 1946 the first airplanes were using the site, and in 1949 San Jose Municipal Airport was dedicated.

Renzel continued his airport involvement as Master of Ceremonies at airport dedication events from 1938 to 1977. He served on the San Jose/Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce Special Aviation Committee, and as a Member and Chair of the San Jose Municipal Airport Commission from 1969 to 1977.

Renzel was honored on several occasions for his work as "Father of the San Jose Airport." On 2nd March, 1994, a bronze bust designed by sculptor Susan Powell was unveiled by Mayor Susan Hammer in the main lobby of San Jose Airport Terminal C following a Rotary Club of San Jose luncheon highlighting Renzel's efforts to establish the airport. The Aero Club of Northern California then passed a resolution on 28 October 2003 to name the airfield at Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International airport "Ernie Renzel Field." In 2004, the San Jose City Council adopted this resolution and honored Renzel, age 97, with a ceremony at City Hall.

Renzel and his wife Emily also loaned money to the City of San Jose in 1951 to buy the land for the existing Kelley Park property, and negotiated the acquisition of the Lewis D. Bohnett collection for the San Jose Historical Museum in 1965. The Chinese Historical and Cultural Project in Kelley Park also benefited from Renzel's benefaction.

While Renzel continued his wholesale business, he was also actively involved in community affairs. He was a long-time member of the Rotary Club of San Jose, listed under "Groceries, Wholesale," served as thirty-second President in 1945 and later as Director. He was also President of the Community Chest and of Associated Wholesalers. Renzel acted as Santa Clara County grand jury foreman in 1970, and gave his service to YMCA fund drives, chamber of commerce groups, and service clubs. He was on the Board of Directors of the San Jose Hospital, the San Jose Art Museum, and the Community Foundation. Renzel was appointed Historic Landmarks Commissioner from 1967-1970 and served as Commissioner of the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara. As a former college athlete, he was a member of the Stanford Athletic Board and was issued the Distinguished Service Award in 1969.

Renzel's public service was honored in 1992, when he received the Legacy Medal from San Jose; in 1994 he received the Rotarian of the Year award. In August 2007, just before his death, Renzel was awarded the City of San Jose Commendation by Mayor Chuck Reed.

Renzel died in San Jose at the age of 100, September 15, 2007.

Scope and Content Summary

Renzel's personal papers document his public service to the City of San Jose and Santa Clara County. The records are housed in two manuscript boxes (1-4), two flat boxes (5,6), and one oversized folder.

The collection is organized into seven series:

- Series 1. Santa Clara Grand Jury, 1970. 1 folder, 2 items.
- Series 2. San Jose City Planning, 1944-1965. 1 folder, 2 items.
- Series 3. San Jose City Records, 1944-1946. 12 folders.
- Subseries 3.1. San Jose City Council Ordinances, July 1944 - June 1946. 1 folder.
- Subseries 3.2. City Council Resolutions, 1944-1946. 3 folders.
- Subseries 3.3. Minutes, 1944-1948. 8 folders.
- Series 4. San Jose Airport, 1939-2007. 2 folders.
- Subseries 4.1. Planning and History, 1939-1977. 1 folder.
- Subseries 4.2. Recognition, 1977-2007. 1 folder, 1 item.
- Series 5. Kelley Park Development, 1951-1991. 3 folders.
- Subseries 5.1. Kelley Park General, 1951. 1 folder.
- Subseries 5.2. Chinese Historical and Cultural Project, 1989-1991. 1 folder.
- Subseries 5.3. Lewis D. Bohnett Collection Acquisition, 1965. 1 folder.

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- Series 6. Personal History, 1900-2007. 3 folders, 4 items.
 - Series 7. Misc. Ephemera and Objects. 1 folder, 2 oversize, 8 objects.

Indexing Terms

The following is a selection of terms that have been used to index the collection in the archives' database.

Subjects

Bohnett, Lewis D.
Campbell, O.W.
Gitin, Joseph
Hammer, Susan
Lynch, John J.
Mineta, Norman
Nissen, James N.
Packard, David
Powell, Susan
Reed, Chuck
Renzel, Ernest H., Jr.
Ruffo, Albert J.
Watson, Fred
Aeronautics -- California -- History.
Aviation -- Santa Clara Valley
Chinese Historical and Cultural Project
City councils--California--San Jose
Elections--California--San Jose.
Grand jury--California--Santa Clara County.
Keystone Company
Museums -- Acquisitions
Museums -- San Jose (Calif.)
Ordinances, Municipal -- California -- San Jose.
Public records -- San Jose (Calif.)
Public records --Santa Clara County (Calif.)
Rotary Club, San Jose, Calif.
Sainte Claire Club (San Jose, Calif.)
San Jose (Calif.) -- History -- 20th century.
San Jose (Calif.) -- City planning
San Jose (Calif.) -- Politics and government
San Jose (Calif.) -- Recreational facilities
San Jose (Calif.). Airport Commission.
San Jose (Calif.) Historic Landmarks Commission
San Jose (Calif.) Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Airport.
Sculpture
Southwest Airways aka Pacific Air Lines (firm)
Stanford University
Traffic engineering--California--San Jose.
United States. Federal Aviation Administration.
Genres and Forms of Materials
Correspondence.
Administrative records.
Clippings (information artifacts).

Color photographs.

Black-and-white photographs.

Scrapbooks.

Posters.

2004-17: Leonard McKay photograph collection

2008-9: Digital gift of images from Ernie Renzel

2009-16: Images of Rotary Club of San Jose past presidents

74-3822: Scrapbook containing newspaper clippings regarding the development of San Jose, 1946-1947.

1997-366-32: Prussia Store Collection: Papers regarding downtown parking in San Jose.

1997-368: Frank Brown Collection

1997-373-72: Map of San Jose Airport with development plans marked; distributed to campaign for Measure "F".

2006-49-4: Gift of Patricia Loomis: Photocopy of speech pamphlet for "The New Metropolis: San Jose between 1942 and 1972" given by George Starbird to the San Jose Rotary Club on March 1, 1972.

2008-131: American Institute of Architects Santa Clara Valley Chapter

1994-87: Bust of Ernie Renzel, Jr. Wax model for Bronze installed at the San Jose international Airport. Artist: Susan Powell.

1995-111-5a: 60 Years of Flight in Santa Clara County. Written and directed by David Elliot, Produced by Alex Zanini - Explores flight from Montgomery (controlled flight innovator) at Santa Clara University to the opening of the new terminal at the San Jose Municipal Airport in 1965.

1996-130: Peninsula Times Tribune photographic collection

1997-208: History San Jose Photographic Collection

1997-237-198: Book, "San Jose International Airport" by Patricia Loomis

1997-373: History San Jose Map Collection

1997-342-125A: San Jose Historical Museum 25th Anniversary, September 1996. Camera 1 raw video. VHS format.

1979-1026: Manuscripts and Small Collections: Special Report created by William C. Brown, Chief of Police, submitted to the San Jose City Manager and City Council. Circa early 1945 (based on information contained within the report).

1986-139-12a: City of San Jose City Council, City Planning Commn. and Administrative Officials: "San Jose: Design for Tomorrow," 1957.

Box No. 2

Series 1. **Santa Clara Grand Jury 1970**

Physical Description: 1 folder and 2 items

Series Scope and Content Summary

Grand Jury Final Report, letterhead, Committee reports, minutes. A scrapbook documents jury business, attendance records, and includes hand-written farewells from all of the Jury members.

This series is arranged chronologically.

Box No. 2

Series 2. **San Jose City Planning 1944-1965**

Physical Description: 1 folder and 2 items

Series Scope and Content Summary

Santa Clara County Master Plan of Governmental Building Site Location (1949); History of the 1944 City Council Election; City Council and City Planning Commission Meeting Minutes (1944); City Planning Commission Progress Reports (1945, 1946); Report on Traffic Control in the San Jose Central Business District (1947); Opinion in the Case of Higgins vs. Lynch et al, filed Jan. 29, 1945; City Manager's News Bulletin (August 1947); Charter of the City of San Jose (May 1965), amended June 1966; "San Jose: A Course for Continued Progress" (1965).

This series is arranged chronologically.

Box Nos. 2-4

Series 3. **San Jose City Records 1944-1946**

Physical Description: 13 folders

Series Scope and Content Summary

These appear to be Renzel's own copies from his term as Councilman and Mayor. Some contain hand-written notes and doodles. The series is arranged chronologically, has been indexed by title and date, and includes three sub series:

- Sub series 3.1. San Jose City Council Ordinances, July 1944 - June 1946. 1 folder.
- Sub series 3.2. City Council Resolutions, 1944-1946. 3 folders.
- Sub series 3.3. Minutes, 1944-1948. 8 folders.

Box No. 1

Series 4. **San Jose Airport 1944-1946**

Physical Description: 2 folders

Series Scope and Content Summary

These appear to be Renzel's own copies from his term as Councilman and Mayor. Some contain hand-written notes and doodles. The series is arranged chronologically and includes two sub series.

Planning and History comprises promises to support and campaign in favor of airport bond; history of San Jose Airport; "Vote Yes" campaign flyer; San Jose Municipal Airport Newsletter; Correspondence regarding airport operating budget; map of proposed municipal airport; aerial map of San Jose Municipal Airport; Program for Dedication Ceremonies; James Nissen correspondence with Renzel; 1977 Flight Schedule

Recognition for Renzel's work includes a commemorative plaque; James Nissen obituary; Nissen/Renzel correspondence; The Clubhouse News; congratulatory correspondence; Jenifer Renzel speeches to Airport Commission and San Jose City Council; City of San Jose Commendation.

- Sub series 4.1. Planning and History, 1939-1977. 1 folder.
- Sub series 4.2. Recognition, 1994-2007. 1 folder.

Box No. 1

Series 5. **Kelley Park Development 1951-1991**

Physical Description: 3 folders

Series Scope and Content Summary

Map of original Kelley Park allotment. Gerrye Wong correspondence. Bills of sale, receipts, inventories for the Lewis D. Bohnett collection.

- Sub series 5.1. Kelley Park General, 1951. 1 folder.
- Sub series 5.2. Chinese Historical and Cultural Project, 1989-1991. 1 folder.
- Sub series 5.3. Lewis D. Bohnett Collection Acquisition, 1965. 1 folder.

Box Nos. 1, 5, 6

Series 6. **Personal History 1900-2007**

Physical Description: 3 folders and 1 box

Series Scope and Content Summary

Included in personal history are Renzel's 82 photographs, his scrapbooks, certificates and awards (1921-2000), newspaper profiles and obituaries, and one book, History of the Rotary Club of San Jose. Renzel maintained four scrapbooks covering the 1944 election, politics and planning during his time on the City Council, and then following his own accomplishments and San Jose politics through the 1970s. Included in one scrapbook are a Progress Committee campaign poster, sample ballot and results from the 1944 San Jose Municipal Election. His service awards are included, as are his elementary school and high school diplomas, and certificates related to his wholesale business, Stanford athletics career and travel to the Magellan Strait and Antarctica.

Renzel's photographs range from turn of the century through 2007, and include many black and white images documenting the history of the San Jose Municipal Airport, as well as color images of the ceremonies honoring Renzel's airport accomplishments and several images of the Renzel wholesale business.

This series is arranged chronologically.

Box Nos. 1, 6

Series 7. **Misc. Ephemera and Objects various**

Physical Description: 1 box and 8 objects

Series Scope and Content Summary

Includes two postcards of downtown San Jose, c. 1960; a mounted advertisement for Keystone Co. Coffee, a photocopy of a photo of the Keystone Co., a campaign pamphlet to support the Government Center at First & Rosa, and a hand-sketched poster given to Renzel to celebrate his airport accomplishments. Eight objects are in the collection: a painting, two carvings, one trivet, one coffee cup, one commemorative plate, one whiskey jug, and a San Jose High School campaign button.

This series is arranged chronologically.