Guide to the Pedro de Saisset Family Collection, circa 1860-1950

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Pedro de Saisset Family Collection
Date (inclusive): circa 1860-1950
Collection Number: 12
Creator: Pedro de Saisset Family
Extent: 3 boxes (1.5 cubic feet)
Repository: Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History, San Jose State University, San Jose, California 95192

Abstract: The Pedro de Saisset Family Collection is primarily comprised of photographs of members of the Pedro de Saisset family from the 1860s to the 1950s. The collection includes portraits of family members, photographs of the family at their ranch in Alameda County and their city home in downtown San Jose, and photographs of extended family and friends in various countries. The collection also includes correspondence between family members and a few pieces of ephemera related to the family.

Language: English

Access
Collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Pedro de Saisset Family Collection, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History, San Jose State University, San Jose, California

Acquisition Information
The Pedro de Saisset Family Collection was donated to Sourisseau Academy by Thomas N. Layton in 2011.

Biographical History
The de Saisset family was a prominent pioneer family in the San Jose and Santa Clara Valley starting in the late 1800s. Pedro de Alcantara Braziliero de Saisset (1829-1902) was a San Jose pioneer, the Honorary Vice-Consul for France and founder of the Brush Electric Company. Pedro de Saisset was born in Paris, France, the son of Henrietta Josephine Mees (1803-1864) and Dom Pedro I of Brazil (1798-1834), Emperor of Brazil. Raised as the son of Pierre Joseph Felix de Saisset, "Officier de la Legion d'Honneur" and Colonel of the French National Guard under Louis Phillip, Pedro de Saisset grew up within an old aristocratic family of France with a strong history of prominent military service including his step-uncle Admiral Jean Marie Joseph Theodore and a step-brother Captaine de Frigate Pierre Joseph Ernest de Saisset (1828-1891).

Pedro de Saisset was sent to the United States during the Third French Revolution in 1848. He arrived in New York and almost immediately upon arrival embarked on the Hector and landed in San Francisco on July 2, 1849. Pedro was sent with merchandise from his affluent family in France with the understanding that he could capitalize on the newly booming markets at San Francisco and then return to France to follow the family tradition of military service. Young Pedro faced unforeseen difficulties, however, after the captain of the Hector deposited Pedro and his personal baggage in San Francisco and sailed away with the majority of the merchandise. de Saisset managed to leverage what resources he did have on his person into buying real estate north of San Jose on the road to Alviso. Here he developed a small farm and carried freight between the boats docking in Alviso and San Jose.

According to descendants’ accounts, it was while hauling produce back and forth from Alviso that he met Maria de Jesus (Jesuita) Palomares (1832-1907), the widow of Jose Sunol, a son of Don Antonio Sunol. Jesuita had three daughters from her previous marriage: Maria Dolores (called Lola) A. Sunol (1851-1910), Narcisia Meleton Sunol (1853-1894) and Maria Josefa Brigida Sunol (1854-1906). Pedro and Jesuita married in St. Joseph's church and Pedro built a three-story Victorian home on the west side of Market Plaza, between Park and San Carlos Street. Jesuita had inherited her husband's share of Rancho Valle de San Jose in Alameda County, consisting of 3,313 acres. Between Pedro's real estate investments, lands inherited through Jesuita's marriage to Jose Sunol, and land inherited through the Palomares family, the family became quite well to do and prominent, particularly in the local French community.

Pedro and Jesuita had four children together: two sons and two daughters. Marie Josephe Henriette de Saisset (1859-1947), called Henriette, was a teacher who later married Dr. E.A. Filipello. Ernest Pierre de Saisset (1862-1899), a graduate of Santa Clara College, became a prominent artist in the area after traveling to Paris to study painting at the Academie Julian.
He returned to San Jose in 1895 and set up a studio at the family home on Market Street. Pierre Edgar Henri de Saisset (1862-1933) was a musician. Isabel de Sasisset (1876-1950) was the longest-lived of the children. As none of the Sunol or de Saisset children had heirs, Isabel left funds to create the de Saisset Museum at Santa Clara University in her brother Ernest's name. The de Saisset real estate holdings at the time of Isabel's death included the still-extant Alcantara Building Hotel Metropole (at South Market and Post Streets) and the New Century Block at the southeast corner of West Santa Clara and Second Streets.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms may be used to index this collection.

**Personal Name**
- de Saisset, Bertha Terese Charlotte
- de Saisset, Ernest Pierre
- de Saisset, Isabel
- de Saisset, Jean Marie Joseph Theodore, Admiral
- de Saisset, Marie Josephe Henriette
- de Saisset, Paul
- de Saisset, Pedro de Alcantara de Brazileiro
- de Saisset, Pierre Edgar Henri
- de Saisset, Pierre Joseph Ernest
- Degraffenried, Friedrich Maria
- Degraffenreid, Guy Arnold
- Degraffenreid, Mathilde Maria
- Degraffenried, Paul Bernhard
- Pedro I of Brazil
- Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil
- Palomares, Maria de Jesus
- Sainsevain, Charles M.
- Sainsevain, Isabelle Paula
- Sainsevain, Lydia B.
- Sainsevain, Michael C.
- Sainsevain, Paul C.
- Sainsevain, Pierre
- Sunol, Maria Dolores A.
- Sunol, Maria Josefa Brigida
- Sunol, Narcisía Meleton

**Subjects**
- Catholic church buildings
- France -- Marine -- Officers
- French Americans
- Missions
- Painters
- Photographs
- Postcards

**Geographic Names**
- Alameda County (Calif.)
- Buen Retiro Ranch (Calif.)
- Jamaica
- Kenya
- Rancho Valle de San Jose (Calif.)
Scope and Content
The Pedro de Saisset Family Collection is comprised of three (3) series: Series I: Photographic Materials; Series II: Correspondence; and Series III: Ephemera.

Series I: Photographic Materials comprises the majority of the collection with 371 photographs spanning the 1860s to the 1950s. The photos follow multiple lines of the de Saisset family, primarily focusing on Pedro de Saisset's children. Included in the photos are extended family members such as the French line of the de Saissets, the Sunols, the Sainsevains and the Brassys. Also included in the photos are properties owned by the de Saisset family, as well as reproductions of Ernest de Saisset's paintings and photos of Ernest painting in his family-owned studio. Additionally, photographs of locations outside the United States, such as a family trip of the Degraffenreid line to Kenya and an unidentified Catholic priest's mission work in Jamaica, are included.

Also contained in this series are a set of unidentified, out-of-state photographs obtained with the original purchase of the de Saisset materials.

Series II: Correspondence contains 72 postcards either addressed to or from various de Saisset extended family members including Isabel de Saisset, Henriette de Saisset, Lillie Sainsevain, and the Sunol sisters.

Series III: Ephemera contains printed items accompanying the previous two series' contents including envelopes from local photographers, the book *Picturesque San Jose and Its Environments*, and an award given to Isabel de Saisset on behalf of the Catholic faith.

Arrangement of the Pedro de Saisset Family Collection
The papers are arranged into three series:

I. Photographic Materials
II. Correspondence
III. Ephemera

Series I: Photographic Materials, 1860-1951
Scope and Content Note
Photographic Materials comprises the majority of the collection with 371 photographs spanning the 1860s to the 1950s. The photos follow multiple lines of the de Saisset family, primarily focusing on Pedro de Saisset's children. Included in the photos are extended family members such as the French line of the de Saissets, the Sunols, the Sainsevains and the Brassys. Also included in the photos are properties owned by the de Saisset family, as well as reproductions of Ernest de Saisset's paintings and photos of Ernest painting in his family-owned studio. Additionally, photographs of locations outside the United States, such as a family trip of the Degraffenreid line to Kenya and an unidentified Catholic priest's mission work in Jamaica, are included.

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Box 1, Folder 2 3639-3650
Box 1, Folder 3 3651-3655
Box 1, Folder 4 3656-3667
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Series I: Photographic Materials, 1860-1951

3974-3983, 3998
Box 1, Folder 22

Unidentified, out-of-state portraits
Box O/S 3, Folder 1

3984
Box O/S 3, Folder 2

3825, 3862, 3985-3986
Box O/S 3, Folder 3

3987-3989
Box O/S 3, Folder 4

3990-3993
Box O/S 3, Folder 5

3994-3996, 3999
Box O/S 3, Folder 6

4000
Box O/S 4, Folder 1

3708

Series II: Correspondence, 1860-1951
Scope and Content Note
Correspondence contains 72 postcards either addressed to or from various de Saisset extended family members including Isabel de Saisset, Henriette de Saisset, Lillie Sainsevain, and the Sunol sisters.

Box 1, Folder 23 Correspondence 1

Box 1, Folder 24

Correspondence 2, 4001-4012

Series III: Ephemera, 1860-1930
Scope and Content Note
Ephemera contains printed items accompanying the previous two series' contents including envelopes from local photographers, the book Picturesque San Jose and Its Environments, and an award given to Isabel de Saisset on behalf of the Catholic faith.

Box 1, Folder 25 Ephemera

Box 0/S 3, Folder 7

Picturesque San Jose and Its Environments
Box 0/S 3, Folder 8
Award for Isabel de Saisset