Durham Ranch Records

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2016
Descriptive Summary
Title: Durham Ranch Records
Dates: 1848-1916
Collection Number: MSS 114
Creator/Collector:
Extent: Items: 2 boxes Linear Feet: .5
Repository: California State University, Chico
Chico, California 95929-0295
Abstract: Robert Durham inherited a part of Samuel Neal's Rancho Esquon in 1859. William W. Durham, a nephew, inherited it from Robert and built up the ranch, adding a mill and almond orchards.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research without restriction.
Publication Rights
The library can only claim physical ownership of the collection. Users are responsible for satisfying any claimants of literary property.
Preferred Citation
Durham Ranch Records. California State University, Chico
Acquisition Information
Gift.
Biography/Administrative History
The story of the Durham Ranch begins with Samuel Neal and David Dutton who first owned the Rancho Esquon. Robert W. Durham came to California in 1852 and became associated with Sam Neal, helping him with his accounts and managing his huge grant. When Sam Neal died, he left his 240 acre farm to Durham plus "all the land I own on the north side of Butte Creek..." The land really became a ranch when Robert W. Durham’s nephew, William Wellington Durham, inherited his uncle’s land and purchased even more land on which to raise horses and cattle. In 1874, William married Minnie Van Ness and in 1878, a son Robert, was born to them. William represented Butte County in the legislature in 1879-80. The Durham Milling Company was organized in 1895, with W. W. Durham as president. The first mill was a one-stone bur steam mill which was later destroyed by fire. A new mill was built in 1900 with a steam roller process. Around this same time, O. C. Pratt was planting the first almond trees in Durham, Butte County became one of the leading almond-producing counties in the state. E. A. Epperson and Durham were responsible for the full-scale commercial growing of almonds in 1895. When Minnie died, William married a school teacher Caroline Roesch. In 1906, William’s son, Robert married Edna Reynolds and had three children—William W., Robert W. Jr., and Elizabeth Ruth. The marriage was an unhappy one due to Roberts’s unpredictable fits of temper and irresponsibility toward his family and home. Robert finally left the ranch, his wife, and children and went to live alone in a solitary cabin. Because he had neglected his bills, the Durham home was forfeited and the land sold by the bank. In 1941, Robert died of cerebral hemorrhage.
Scope and Content of Collection
Documents in the collection include land transfers, Samuel Neal's will, Caroline Roesch 1873 teaching certificate and an account book for the ranch.
Indexing Terms
Durham, Robert W., 1818-1872
Durham, William Wellington
Neal, Samuel, 1816-1859
Sierra Lumber Company (Calif.)
Lumber trade--California--Chico
Rancho Esquon (Butte County, Calif.)
Almond Industry--California

Finding Aid