Guide to the Richard Stephens Diary Collection MS 238

Finding aid prepared by Katrina White
Collection processed as part of grant project supported by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) with generous funding from The Andrew Mellon Foundation.
San Diego History Center Document Collection
1649 El Prado, Suite 3
San Diego, CA, 92101
619-232-6203
September 12, 2012
Richard Stephens Diary Collection

**Identifier/Call Number:** MS 238

**Contributing Institution:** San Diego History Center Document Collection

**Language of Material:** English

**Physical Description:** 0.75 Linear feet (2 boxes)

**Date (inclusive):** 1885-1917

**Abstract:** This collection contains five volumes of diaries by surveyor Richard Stephens dated between 1885 and 1917.

**Language of Materials:** Collection materials are in English and Spanish.

**creator:** Stephens, Richard

**Conditions Governing Access**

This collection is open for research.

**Conditions Governing Use**

The San Diego History Center (SDHC) holds the copyright to any unpublished materials. SDHC Library regulations do apply.

**Preferred Citation**

Richard Stephens Diary Collection, MS 238, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA.

**Processing Information**

Collection processed by Katrina White on September 12, 2012.

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**Biographical / Historical Notes**

Richard Stephens was born on July 24, 1830 in Devonshire, England to Thomas and Susan Stephens. Stephens had two siblings younger than himself; a brother who died in infancy and a sister who died at sea in 1842 as the family was making the passage to Canada from England. In Canada, Stephens lived in Port Dover, Ontario and worked as a farmer with his father, even though his dad had studied engineering. After his mother died (date unknown; father had passed away previously on an unknown date), Stephens made the decision to leave Canada because he could no longer take the extremes of Canadian weather. Stephens decided to visit San Diego in June 1885, and by June 29, 1885, the city became his home base. Stephens still held on to the property he had in Port Dover (Silver Lake), and visited Canada on many occasions, but he never moved back to Canada. In November 1885 Stephens was offered the position of civil engineer with the Mexican Land and Colonization Company. He accepted the position; thereafter the diaries reflected a life being lived between San Diego and the unpopulated regions of Baja California.

During his years with the company, Stephens bought land in Baja California, most notably Rancho Huecos y Baldios and Rancho San Ramon. At one point Stephens hoped to create a Canadian colony in these lands, but due to lack of irrigation, little interest, and legal disputes, this vision never came to fruition. Stephens resigned from the company in 1890 after becoming aware of the corruption and illegal actions of many of its employees. After resigning from the company, Stephens continued to survey land and mines in Baja independently, both for himself and other prospectors. From the period after Stephens resigned from the company to the end of his life, Stephens was continuously involved in land disputes regarding his property in Baja California.

It is unknown the exact date that Stephens stopped doing surveyor work or why he stopped, but by 1915 to the end of his diary entries, he was living at his residence in San Diego. Stephens mentioned in his diaries that his father had died of skin cancer, and that he had also removed some abnormal skin growths. Some of his last entries report that he was getting treatments, but it doesn’t specify what they were for. The exact date or cause of death is unknown, but his last written entry was dated July 11, 1917. Stephens never married nor had any children.

**Immediate Source of Acquisition**


**Arrangement**

Collection is arranged chronologically.

**Scope and Content**

This collection contains five volumes of diaries by Richard Stephens during his years of residence in San Diego from 1885 to 1917. The diaries include personal entries as well as transcriptions of correspondence and documents regarding land grants in Baja California. The majority of the entries address Stephens’ work as a surveyor of land and mines in Baja as well as the land disputes in which he was involved. There are also two loose documents that have been removed from one of the
volumes, including a hand-drawn map of Seavy Land in Baja that encompasses Tepeyac.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Aguilar, Manuel
Alarcon, M. M.
Cannon, Ed
Cota, Enrique B.
Daggett, Henry
Denton, William
Flower, Morris F.
Fuller, George
Horton House.
International Colonization Company.
International Company of Mexico.
Norton, Alonzo
Ruiz Burton, Maria Amparo
Scott, Chalmers
Sessions, Kate Olivia, 1857-1940
Sisson, George H.
Smith, Walter Gifford
Stephens, Richard
Young, C. J.
Baja California (Mexico: Peninsula)
Calexico (Calif.)
Coronado (Calif.)
Deeds
Del Mar (Calif.)
Encinitas (Calif.)
Ensenada (Baja California, Mexico)
Filibusters
Land grants
Land surveying
Los Angeles (Calif.)
Maps
Mines and mineral resources
Port Dover (Ont.)
Rancho Huecos y Baldios
Rancho San Ramon
Real property surveys
Rosarito (Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico)
San Diego (Calif.)
San Francisco (Calif.)
San Quintin (Baja California, Mexico)
Santo Tomas
Surveying
Tijuana (Baja California, Mexico)
Richard Stephens Diary: Volume I, 1885 January-1899 November

Scope and Content
During the years covered in this volume, Stephens moves from Canada to San Diego. He buys property and builds a house there, then begins to work for the Mexican Land and Colonization Company until quitting in 1890. He travels throughout Baja California surveying land for the company from 1885 to 1890, and independently after his 1890 resignation. Stephens buys two tracts of land during his work for the company: Rancho San Ramon and Rancho Huecos y Baldios. Much of the diary consists of notes regarding the corruption and illegal actions of the Colonization Company as well as land disputes Stephens was involved in. This is the most detailed and extensive of the five volumes of diaries.

Entries of interest:
Begins with personal autobiography and poem written in deceased sister’s honor (prior to page 1)
June 8, 1885: “Why do I leave Canada?... The most disagreeable thing about Canada – is the climate” (page 6). He didn’t like the climate’s effects on horticulture which was his “chief delight.”

Leaves for California on June 9, 1885.

November 27, 1885: Meets Wallace Parker who is seeking a Draftsman to go to Mexico
“Long interview with Parker. He presses me to go down to Ensenada on Todos Santos Bay, in Lower California, Mexico, to work up Plans of Surveys, for a Company who have a Concession to a large tract of land in that country, from the Government of Mexico. They offer me $125.00 for work to last about two weeks – or a month at most, and all expenses paid. It appears my work on the map of San Diego has brought me somewhat into notice. Thinking it may still further advance my chances to gain an opening in my profession, and wishing to see something of Mexico.” (page 19)

Leaves for Mexico with Mr. Scofield of Mexican Land and Colonization Company on November 28, 1885.

December 2-5, 1885: “Work on skeleton maps, coastlines, till Mr. [William] Denton the Company’s Engineer who is out on surveys returns with his Field Notes.” (page 19)
December 7, 1885: “Mr. Denton the Company’s Engineer who has been engaged in fieldwork during the past summer returned with his outfit, and notes of surveys.” (page 19)


Notes in red ink (added later by Stephens): “Inauguration of Company’s enterprise. Is it a fake?... Query? July 1890 – It took several years to solve this query. When positively assured the company would never comply to the obligations to the Government and people of Mexico – Sense of justice compelled me to cut loose.” (pages 20-21)

December 20, 1885: “I find this job will take more time than was expected. Only four days to Christmas – and the maps scarcely commenced. Mr. Denton’s notes are extremely meager. He has made no actual surveys, and his trigonometrical work does not conform to the coast surveys. This scheme of his is to make four maps – each extending from the Ocean to the Gulf... I tell Huller and Scofield plainly - ‘This sort of work is simply fake!’ A kind of work I have never before attempted, nor been asked to perform. Of course Denton assumes the responsibility as Chief Engineer. Sooner or later the fraud will come to light! But what can be done? The Co. have a little empire here if properly managed.” (page 20)

Description of San Quentin (pages 39, 91-98)

Stephens is commissioned by Co. to explore a feasible route for a railway they want to establish (page 46)

March 4, 1889: “Our camp is located at foot of Sosio’s Canyon, close to the road which leads from San Diego to the new gold diggings – Alamo - or Mexican Gulch! A constant stream of gold hunters are moving in the direction of the reported Placers; with every sort of an outfit that can hop or trundle! Men on foot, with packs and without. Men on horses, mules, burros, in wagons, carts – slung on poles, dog-carts, push carts, pull carts, wheelbarrows and baby carriages. A few women and kiddies! Some well-supplied with provisions and blankets – others without either! Our cook kept tally today of over 300 beguiled mortals, of all sorts, sizes and sexes – going to seek the nuggets.” (pages 71-72)

June 15-July 7, 1889: Stephens ill with an infected protrusion on his neck, confined to bed. (pages 75-76)

September 23, 1889: “The London Syndicate in taking over the International Company’s holdings in Lower California - as well as the Charter for the Railway for were – but superficially acquainted with the character of the country – especially the obstacles to be surmounted in Railway building... It being certain that no vigorous prosecution of Railway work is
Box-folder 1:2

**Richard Stephens Diary: Volume II, 1896 September-1903 October**

**Scope and Content**

The majority of the volume is made up of transcriptions of correspondence in English and Spanish between Stephens and various friends, acquaintances and business partners in San Diego, Canada and Baja regarding land holdings, surveying, taxes and other financial matters (pages 1-162). Many are regarding mine surveying that Stephens was conducting for different individual investors/prospectors from San Diego and Baja. Several personal letters addressed to a “Dearest Friend” are also included – addressee unknown although it appears to be a woman. Most of the correspondence is regarding the Rancho San Ramon case. A small portion of the volume, which begins from the back and moves backward, includes diary entries beginning January 1897 through December 1901 (pages 172-224). Diary entries generally cover Stephens’ travels throughout Baja California to survey mines. He spent much of his time during 1897 and 1898 travelling back and forth between San Diego and Ensenada, both on legal business regarding San Ramon and on small surveying jobs. He spent the majority of 1899 travelling in Baja and surveying for private investors. There are some entries regarding land disputes, finances, or travel to and from San Diego.

**Entries of interest:**
- Paper titled “The Locations of Natural Gas and Oil” by Richard Stephens, July 31, 1901 (pages 144-151)
- Paper titled “Oil and Gas in Lower California” by Richard Stephens, July 30, 1903 (pages 163-168)
- Short story/anecdote titled “An Incident at Breakfast” by Stephens, October 11, 1903 (pages 168-169)

Box-folder 1:3


**Scope and Content**

The majority of the volume is made up of transcriptions of correspondence in English and Spanish between Stephens and various friends, acquaintances and business partners (pages 1-178). Correspondence includes letters to business partners and acquaintances in San Diego, Canada and Baja regarding land holdings, surveying, taxes and other financial matters. Many are regarding mine surveying that Stephens was conducting for different individual investors/prospectors from San Diego and Baja. Several personal letters addressed to a “Dearest Friend” are also included – addressee unknown although it appears to be a woman. Many letters from these years (1902-1905) are related to Stephens’ Huecos y Baldios lawsuit. A small portion of the volume, which begins from the back and moves backward, includes diary entries beginning January 1902 through December 1905 (pages 180-224). Diary entries generally cover Stephens’ travels throughout Baja California to survey mines. Some entries regarding land grant issues including the Huecos y Baldios case, finances, or travel to and from San Diego.

**Entries of interest:**
- Copy of Lease of San Ramon Ranch (pages 101-104)
- Transcription of statement to the Baja California court for Stephens’ lawsuit regarding Rancho Huecos y Baldios (pages 168-171; Spanish translation, pages 172-175)

Box-folder 1:4


**Includes:**
- Hand-drawn map of Seavy Land (Baja), undated (encapsulated)
- Loose handwritten note, November 1904–January 1905
Box-folder 2:1

Richard Stephens Diary: Volume IV, 1892 June, 1906 January-1909 December

Scope and Content
The majority of the volume is made up of transcriptions of correspondence in English and Spanish between Stephens and various friends, acquaintances and business partners (pages 1-184). Correspondence includes letters to business partners and acquaintances in San Diego, Canada and Baja regarding land holdings, surveying, taxes and other financial matters. Many are regarding mine surveying that Stephens was conducting for different individual investors/prospectors from San Diego and Baja. There are also several copied documents and notes regarding the Huecos y Baldios case. Several personal letters addressed to a “Dearest Friend” are also included – addressee unknown although it appears to be a woman. A small portion of the volume, which begins from the back and moves backward, includes diary entries beginning January 1906 through December 1909 (pages 194-224). Diary entries from 1907 through 1909 generally cover Stephens’ travels throughout Baja California to survey mines. Some entries regarding land grant issues, finances, or travel to and from San Diego.

Entries of interest:
Inserted newspaper clipping: “Oil Gushes Forth in Valley as Quake Rocks Southland,” 1915 Nov. 26 (between pages 16 and 17)
“Huecos y Baldios” court document in Spanish (pages 41-53)
“Re: Huecos y Baldios – Interview with Governor Celsa Vega” (pages 55-57)
Inserted hand-drawn map of Huecos y Baldios (between pages 56 and 57)
“Questions Re- Huecos y Baldios” (pages 66-67)
Entry “Re Huecos y Baldios” (pages 80-82, 102)
Transcription of Mortgage on Santa Maria, 1892 (pages 117-118)
Reflection on “What is Religion?” citations of Lord Byron and San Ramon (pages 164-165)
“Huecos y Baldios de Guadalupe, Costs brought forward de 1907” (page 170)
“Inventory, or Synopsis of Lands & Other Securities, Dec. 31, 1906” (pages 216-215)
Scope and Content

The majority of the volume is blank. The front of the volume consists of transcriptions of documents pertaining to the Huecos y Baldios case, as well as reflections written by Stephens on different topics, including war and the discovery of certain lands in Baja. It also includes copies of correspondence in English and Spanish between Stephens and various friends, acquaintances and business partners (pages 1-77). Correspondence includes letters to business partners and acquaintances in San Diego, Canada and Baja regarding landholdings, surveying, taxes and other financial matters. Many are regarding mine surveying that Stephens was conducting for different individual investors/prospectors from San Diego and Baja. There are also several copied documents and notes regarding the Huecos y Baldios case. Several personal letters addressed to a “Dearest Friend” are also included – addressee unknown although it appears to be a woman. A small portion of the volume, which begins from the back and moves backward, includes diary entries beginning Jan. 1915 through Jan. 1917 (pages 292-300). Stephens spent all of 1915, 1916 and 1917 in San Diego due to consular issues between the U.S. and Mexico that made it unsafe for Americans to be in Baja. Most diary entries from these years address finances, land investments, or social visits and errands.

Entries of interest:

“San Ramon: Second Part, Synopsis of the Madden Case” (pages 1-10)
Copy of Minutes of Contract of Lease to Part of San Ramon Ranch (pages 10a-10e)
“War” (page 11)
“The Finding of San Ramon” (pages 12-14)
“Notes on Reconstruction of Mexico” (pages 38a-39)
“Report on Mine Evolucion” (page 40)
“San Diego Water Question” (pages 43-44)