Guide to the Joseph Foster Diary Collection MS 97

Finding aid prepared by Jody Valente
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
December 19, 2011
Title: Joseph Foster Diary Collection
Identifier/Call Number: MS 97
Contributing Institution: San Diego History Center Document Collection
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 0.25 Linear feet(1 box)
Date (inclusive): 1873 February 19-1882 January 20
Abstract: This collection contains two diaries written by Joseph Foster during his early adulthood documenting daily activities, sheep herding, and travel to various regions of California to purchase livestock.
creator: Foster, Joseph

Biographical / Historical Notes
Joseph Foster reports himself being born on August 15, 1856 in Sacramento, California, although this information is not officially confirmed. Foster arrived in San Diego County in 1868 and boarded with James Johnson. Foster lived with the Johnsons in Sycamore Valley through his mid-twenties.
Foster bought a ranch located three miles north of Lakeside in 1880 and worked as a shepherd, shearing as many as 150 sheep in a day with the assistance of other men. In 1883, he became the road overseer of San Vicente District. In 1888, he established a stage line drawn by four horses that ran from San Diego to Julian and from El Cajon to Stonewall. He started this venture with the former mayor of San Diego, Frank Frary. In 1898, he bought Frary’s interest in the company. In the 1890s, the railroad line of San Diego, Cuyamaca and Eastern was extended 23 miles outside of San Diego, ending at Foster’s ranch. The station was known as Foster’s Station and town was named Foster, as it had been established by Joseph Foster.

In 1906, Foster was elected to serve as supervisor for East County. He was continuously re-elected until his retirement in 1929, serving for 23 years. In addition, he served as chairman of the Board of Supervisors for 14 years. With all of his years of public service, he became known affectionately as “Uncle Joe.” When he retired, he said that it was partially to justify having a retirement party – over 400 people attended.
Foster married his wife, Martha (maiden name Swycaffer), on February 8, 1880. They had a son, Arthur, and daughter, Lula (married name McDonald). "Uncle Joe" Foster died April 9, 1933.

Processing Information
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Preferred Citation
Joseph Foster Diary Collection, MS 97, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA.
Conditions Governing Access
This collection is open for research.
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Arrangement
Diaries arranged in chronological order.
Scope and Content
The collection contains two journals written by Joseph Foster recording his daily work and personal activities in San Diego county. The first journal (February 19, 1873-March 28, 1877) includes entries that record the weather and shepherding, as well as travel to various grazing regions of California with the sheep. As the diary progresses, Foster notes hiring workers to assist with shepherding and ranch activities, taking more of a business role in the ranch. In the second diary (March 29, 1877-January 20, 1892), Foster appears to be herding sheep less frequently. Foster documents interests outside of work, including debates, dances and singing clubs. The first mentions of his future wife, Martha Swycaffer, are also recorded in this diary.
Subjects and Indexing Terms
Foster, Joseph
Foster, Martha
Johnson, James
Littlefrage, Louis
Swycaffer family
Swycaffer, Jeff
Ballena (Calif.)
Cuyamaca Mountains (Calif.)
El Cajon (Calif.)
Encinitas (Calif.)
Julian (Calif.)
Ranching
San Diego (Calif.)
Santa Ysabel (Calif.)
Sheepherding