John A. Wright and Michael Maher San Francisco earthquake accounts

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Descriptive Summary
Title: John A. Wright and Michael Maher San Francisco earthquake accounts
Dates: 1906
Collection Number: SFH 482
Extent: 2 folders
Repository: San Francisco Public Library. San Francisco History Center
Abstract: Four accounts of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire
Language of Material: English
Access
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Acquisition Information
Gift, 2018-10
Biography/Administrative History
John A. Wright, born Ireland, came to the U.S. in 1865. He worked as an attorney in San Francisco; he was married to Elizabeth Strother and had three daughters and a son. Michael Maher, also born in Ireland, worked as a laborer at the Santa Fe freight sheds near Spear St., San Francisco, and at the time of the earthquake was single. William Duggan worked as a stenographer in San Francisco, at one time employed by Pacific Gas & Electric Co.; he produced the four typescripts in this collection.
Scope and Content of Collection
One folder includes two accounts, dated April 24 (six leaves) and May 3, 1906 (five leaves) by attorney John A. Wright of 2222 Washington St., San Francisco. The second folder includes an account (12 leaves) dated December 1, 1906 by railroad employee Michael Maher of 234 East St., and another account (12 leaves) dated April 25, 1906 by an unidentified man who boarded at 264 Fifth St. William Duggan worked as a stenographer in San Francisco; he produced the four typescripts in this collection. Wright’s April 24 account describes Mrs. Wright (Elizabeth), children Sarah, Elizabeth and John preparing to leave their home near Lafayette Square for a camp in the Presidio. He writes of rumors of the drunkenness of soldiers, firemen and police after their exertions; the dynamiting of buildings, and tremors from the explosions; moving mattresses out of his house into Mrs. Ives’ cottage, next door; borrowing a surrey and two horses from Mrs. McLean to take family and belongings to the Presidio. The next day they continue to the Presidio, setting up camp on a hill facing south, opposite the golf club house. The Presidio grounds are crowded with a throng of campers. After a night camping, they return to Judge Allen’s, and the women and children then travel to Allen’s country home in Menlo Park, where they will remain for months.
Wright’s office in the Mutual Life Assurance building burned; his firm’s records of 37 years destroyed. Wright turned most rooms of his home over to the relief committee as a clothing depot, his library becoming his law office. Wright’s May 3 account of the disaster repeats much of this April 24 account, and a note from Duggan indicates it was excerpted from a letter Wright sent to a friend. Maher’s account traces his movements from the Miner’s Hotel, 261 First St. when the ‘quake hit, to the Santa Fe Freight sheds (where he was employed) to the Ferry Building, where he was locked up for one night by soldiers for violating curfew. He had helped his landlady, Nora Roach, her two daughters and other residents evacuate the hotel, which later burned down. He describes a breadline, and his lodgings at the sheds at Spear Street near the wharf. Three days after the ‘quake, he crosses to Oakland to buy food and clothing, and returns to the sheds by barge from Point Richmond. The second half of his account speaks generally of the mood of the people; scenes of the fires; hordes of people moving west from downtown; the transport of household pets; the dynamiting of buildings, and rainfall. Maher writes of the ransacking of grocery stores, sometimes sanctioned by the authorities; the destruction of barrels of whiskey; the high prices charged to transport people and belongings; grub lines and double-dipping. Maher describes the rebuilding activities
downtown; the effects of the track laborers’ strike of United Railroads; the graft exposed in City Hall, and his concerns about religious prejudice swaying public opinion of the Mayor and others. The anonymous April 25 account discusses movements of the Todd family; of the author’s landlady, Mrs. John Todd, as well as of John and George Todd, who with Mr. Hollbrook, comprised United Special Delivery, a firm whose thirteen wagons aided the evacuation of people and belongings during the conflagration. The Todd rooming house burnt down; the author, the Todds and others moved into the Mission district, camped at Howard and 21st Streets, and kept watch in shifts in the ensuing nights. Author witnessed the ransacking of a store, and the Army’s discovery of whiskey, which was emptied into sewers; he witnessed men ordered by the Army to haul dynamite, and the fire, reaching 17th and Howard streets, being fought; he joined in the looting of flour at Homestead Bakery, on 19th St., under gaze of soldiers; he violated a curfew, and was forced at gunpoint to bake bread for other refugees; described a grub line, and greedy individuals. Account ends with good wishes for the new San Francisco, almost identical to Maher’s close. Maher’s name is penciled on the first page, though this account seems to be written by someone else.

Indexing Terms
San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, Calif., 1906--Personal narratives.
Fires—California—San Francisco.
Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad Company—Employees.
Irish—California—San Francisco.
Lodging-houses—California—San Francisco.
Boardinghouses—California—San Francisco.
Lawyers—California—San Francisco.
Wright, John A., d. 1913 – Archives.
Maher, Michael – Archives.
Todd family.
United Special Delivery (San Francisco, Calif.)
South of Market (San Francisco, Calif.)
Mission District (San Francisco, Calif.)