Finding aid of the Johann Edward Knoche Memoirs, 1819 -- 1901

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Collection number:
The Society of California Pioneers
San Francisco, California

Processed by:
Kris Casler

Date Completed:
December 9, 2009

Encoded by:
Kris Casler

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Johann Edward Knoche Memoirs, 1819 -- 1901
Dates: 1819 - 1901
Collection Size: 1 folder
San Francisco, California 94107-1272

Abstract: The memoir of Johann Edward Knoche, an early member of the Society of California Pioneers, describes his trip by ship to San Francisco in 1849, his early work in the city, and his journey on foot to mine for gold. The remainder of the memoir describes his life in San Jose as a businessman and farmer.

Physical location: Stored on-site at the Society of California Pioneers
Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access
Collection is open by appointment for research.

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Preferred Citation

Biography / Administrative History
Johann E. Knoche, an early member of the Society of California Pioneers, was born March 1, 1819 in Salzderhelden, Germany, where he studied the trade of a silver and goldsmith for five years. He immigrated to New Orleans in 1846 and departed by ship for California in the spring of 1849. Traveling around Cape Horn he arrived in San Francisco October 21, 1849. He engaged in the business of coffee vendor, waiter and later as a watchmaker and jeweler on Kearny Street. Knoche left for the mines in 1850 and stayed only one year. He then traveled to San Jose where he began general farming until 1870 and returned to Germany for several years. He then returned to San Jose where he died October 29, 1903.

Scope and Content of Collection
Johann Edward Knoche’s Memoirs begin with a brief description of the author’s family and their lives in Germany prior to his emigration. The memoir then continues with the author’s arrival in New Orleans in 1846 and details his trip by sea around Cape Horn to California on the bark Montgomery. He describes his life after arriving in San Francisco and gives many details about the weather, costs and quality of accommodations, the crush of newly arrived fortune seekers, and the availability and types of work in which he engaged during 1849. Knoche describes his journey with four fellow German immigrants by foot in April 1850 to the mines through San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Gilroy and into the San Joaquin Valley. He describes two separate mining partnerships in the area of Mariposa near Yosemite, neither of which proved successful for Knoche. In 1851, upon returning to San Francisco, he describes a new partnership he entered into with two other men, one from Alsace and another from Normandy. Their first business, a shop established in San Jose, provided alcohol to the campaign to elect Fremont to the United States Senate. Later they purchased a gambling house called the Mariposa. Knoche’s
partners bought out his share of the business and his memoirs give details about the dissolution of their relationship. The author then describes the remainder of his life in San Jose as a farmer in the region. Knoche describes the hardships associated with his early agricultural venture that was followed by a more successful farming experience. He then mentions that he and his wife returned to Germany, but ultimately they came back to San Jose where they established a successful farm.

The end of the memoir consists of seven separate recollections: the first gives further details of his business as a coffee vendor primarily serving the clientele of the gambling houses in that area of San Francisco; the second describes a fight he witnessed that was orchestrated between a bear and a number of bulls in 1851; the third discusses the pear orchards of the Santa Clara valley and an incident whereby a squatter took possession of the mission orchards in 1849; the fourth discusses Knoche's attempt to enter the silk trade in the 1850s in San Jose; the fifth briefly discusses the value of real estate during pioneers days; the sixth reminiscence is about James Lick and his place in San Jose area history; and the seventh describes the monetary system during the pioneer days of California.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
Pioneers - California
Voyages to the Pacific coast
Mines and Mineral resources - California - Mariposa County
Knoche, Johann Edward, 1819 - 1903

Related Material
Biographical File Autobiography Record, Volume 3, pg.67 Archives Record, Volume 2, pg. 294 Obituary Record, Volume 10, pg. 71