Guide to the Townsend Family Papers 1826-1914

CR-2008-05-01

California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library

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May 2008
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Collection Summary
Title: Townsend Family Papers
Date (inclusive): 1826-1914
Date (bulk): (bulk 1840-1850)
Collection number: CR-2008-05-01
Collector: Arbuckle, Clyde, 1903-1998
Collection Size: 1 oversized flat box1 carton1 linear foot
Repository: San Jose Public Library
San Jose, CA 95112
Abstract: The Townsend Family Papers collection contains correspondence, business and other personal documents of Dr. John Townsend, his wife Elizabeth Townsend, and their son John Henry Moses Townsend. Items in this collection offer glimpses into the Townsends’ lives: their travels with the Murphy party, their real estate investments and their roles as settlers of Northern California during the mid to late 1800s.
Physical location:
For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library’s online catalog
Languages:
Languages represented in the collection: English
Access
Collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Townsend Family Papers, Courtesy of the San Jose Public Library, California Room Library.
Acquisition Information
This collection is part of a larger collection purchased from the estate of Clyde Arbuckle by the San Jose Public Library for the California Room. 1999
Custodial History

Clyde Arbuckle collected the materials that comprise the Townsend Family Papers during his tenure as the city of San Jose's official historian from 1945 to 1998. Upon his death the materials passed on to his family where it was held until purchased by the San Jose Public Library.

Biographical History

Dr. John Townsend was born in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. His parents, who were among the first settlers of Fayette County, arrived in America from England in the late eighteenth century. Dr. Townsend received his first medical degree from Lexington Medical College and later set up successful practices in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Missouri. In 1832, he and Elizabeth Louise Schallenberger were married in Stark County, Ohio.

John and Elizabeth Townsend are most known for their pioneering expedition from Missouri to California as members of the Murphy party in 1844, only three years after the first overland journey to California. In fact, the Murphy expedition marked the first time that a party traveling with covered wagons traversed the Sierras. Cabins built in the Sierras by the Murphy party were inhabited two years later by members of the ill-fated Donner party.

Dr. Townsend quickly established himself as a prominent California resident. In 1847, he became one of San Francisco's first alcaldes a Spanish title, analogous to a mayor, which was given to the town's chief administrator of legislative and judicial affairs. Two years later, Dr. Townsend moved his family to Santa Clara County where he established his home in an adobe house 2 miles from San Jose near Coyote Creek. He bought and improved 195 acres of land in the surrounding area, including lands on the Pueblo of San Jose. Soon after this, John and Elizabeth quickly succumbed to the Cholera epidemic that was sweeping California at this time and passed away in 1850 leaving behind their two year old son, John Henry Moses Townsend. In Dr. Townsend's will, Elizabeth's brother, Moses Schallenberger, was appointed executor of Townsend's sizeable estate and guardian of his only son.

J.H.M. Townsend was born in San Francisco on November 26, 1848. He is thought to be the first child born in California of American parents. After John and Elizabeth's passing, he was raised by his uncle Moses and his wife Fannie. J.H.M. attended Santa Clara College and later studied at Cambridge University in London. Like his father, J.H.M. rose to prominence in Santa Clara County. In 1877, he was elected to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. He was also a California State Assemblyman from 1883-1884. J.H.M. Townsend died in 1914 at the age of 65. His eulogy, written by the Society of California Pioneers of which he was a member, can be found in this collection.

Bibliography

Foote, H.S. Pen pictures from the garden of the world, or Santa Clara County, California. (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1888).

Hall, F. The history of San Jose and surroundings with biographical sketches of early settlers. (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Company, 1871).


Scope and Content

This collection offers primary source material regarding the lives of the Townsend family. It contains correspondence, real estate records, tax records, school work, and other certificates and official paperwork.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged into one series, which includes the papers of Dr. John Townsend, Elizabeth Townsend, and John Henry Moses Townsend.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index similar items in the Library Of Congress Subjects

Pioneers--California--Biography
Overland Journeys to the Pacific
Santa Clara Valley (Santa Clara County, Calif.)--History
Society of California Pioneers
Series I Writings and Documents 1826-1914 (bulk 1840-1850)

Physical Description: 9 folders

Scope and Content Note

The contents of this series are arranged alphabetically by format.

The contents of this series contain correspondence, papers regarding the functioning of the Townsend estate, medical drawings, assorted real estate and tax records, certificates of membership to different local societies, marriage certificates, birth certificates, school essays, and a eulogy as prepared by the Society of California Pioneers.

Box/Folder 1/1 Correspondence, 1826-1841 1826, 1827, 1830, 1837, 1840, 1841 (bulk 1840)
Box/Folder 1/2 Correspondence, 1847-1850 1847-1850 (bulk 1849)
Box/Folder 1/3 Probate and Wills 1848, 1850, 1851, 1853, 1855, 1857, 1872
Box/Folder 1/4 Medical Journals circa 1830
Box/Folder 1/5 Real Estate Records 1828, 1837-1850, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1865, 1868, 1870, 1873, 1898 (bulk 1850)
Box/Folder 2/6 Certificates and Official Paperwork 1850, 1861, 1865, 1872-1877, 1881, 1886, 1904
Box/Folder 2/7 Eulogy 1914
Box/Folder 2/8 School Writings circa 1870
Box/Folder 2/9 Tax Records 1867 - 1881, 1893, 1898-1912