Gin/Louis Family Collection

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2016
Descriptive Summary

Title: Gin/Louis Family Collection

Dates: 1830-1977, bulk 1910-1960

Collection Number: 1998.003

Creator/Collector: Louis, Wong Young (Jung Yeong), 1893-1988
Louis, Stella Chandler, 1897-1996
Louis, George Ah Him, 1899-1993
Louis, Mae, 1895-1988
Louis, Elsie, 1914-2008
Gin, Carol
Gin

Extent: 12 Page Boxes and 12 Hollinger Boxes (approximately 19.17 Linear Feet)

Repository: History Center of San Luis Obispo County
San Luis Obispo, California 93401

Abstract: The Gin/Louis Collection contains family keepsakes, school books, and photos and receipts from Young Louis’s photography studio. The Louis family were pioneers of San Luis Obispo and founding members of the city’s Chinese community.

Language of Material: English

Access

Collections open for research. Some materials stored offsite. Contact the History Center in advance to request access the materials.

Publication Rights

Collections open for research. Property rights reside with the History Center. Selected copyrights may be retained by the creators of the records and their heirs.

Preferred Citation

Gin/Louis Family Collection. History Center of San Luis Obispo County

Acquisition Information

Donated by Carol Gin in 1998.

Biography/Administrative History

In total, Ah Luis had eight children that he had raised in San Luis Obispo. His oldest son, Young Louis also was a major influence in the San Luis Obispo area. He was a movie projectionist for San Luis Obispo’s Palm Theater, a movie projectionist and stage manager who personally worked for William Randolph Hearst at Hearst Castle, and one of the first Chinese Americans to graduate from the California State Polytechnic College in San Luis Obispo. He married Stella Chandler and together they both founded the Chinese Student Association at Cal Poly SLO, an organization that brought together Chinese Americans all from first, second, and third generations and provided a comfortable circle for the Chinese minority on campus to learn Chinese tradition through Lion Dancing and promote Chinese culture both on campus and to the San Luis Obispo area. Among other achievements, Young Louis was a professional photographer who owned his own studio in San Luis Obispo on Chorro Street, a muralist, and an artist. Young’s father Ah Louis, also known by his Chinese name Wong On, immigrated to the United States during the 1850’s in pursuit of the gold rush. He eventually settled in San Luis Obispo in 1870 and acted as a laborer contractor, organizing crews of Chinese immigrants to help construct the Pacific Coast Railroad, mine the quicksilver mines near the town of Cambria, and drain the Laguna Lake area as well as the swampland between San Luis Obispo and Pismo Beach in 1882. He also operated a Chinese goods shop on Chorro Street in the Chinatown district of San Luis Obispo, operated as a banker to the Chinese, owned a brickyard, and produced seed farms selling his produce to the American navy and armies during both World War I and World War II.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection spans two generations of the Louis family. This includes Ah Louis’ children, his children’s spouses, as well as Ah Louis’ grandchildren, particularly Elsie Louis. These records date from the 1850’s through the 1950’s. The Personal Series consists of ephemera, books, records, and photos that pertain to Young Louis’s family and social life. These items reflect Young’s hobbies such as music, photography, film, and art. Also included are his collected mementos, objects like books, souvenirs, and photos from traveling, social events in the San Luis Obispo area, and family events. This series also includes objects that reflect the historical periods in which he lived. These items include newspapers covering pieces on World War II, articles written on the Louis family in San Luis Obispo, Chinese American history on the central coast of California, and music books on jazz and classical compositions that convey the aesthetic tastes of both the Victorian Era and the jazz age of the 1920’s through the Great Depression. Not only is this series a reflection on the life of Young Louis but also a micro history of the social, political, and cultural environments of the rapidly changing twentieth century in which a second generation Chinese American lived. The Professional Series consists of over two hundred photos, most of which are remnants of Young Louis’s customers’ photo orders, along with their receipts of purchase. This series is significant in
that it offers names and photos of families and individuals that lived within and around the San Luis Obispo area. The images offer insight into the lifestyle, culture, ethnic diversity, and development of the area during the 1940’s and 1950’s as well as the continuing prominence of the Louis family as entrepreneurs in the San Luis Obispo area.

**Indexing Terms**
- Chinese-American
- Immigrant
- Louis Family
- Louis, Wong Young (Jung Yeong)
- Louis, Ah
- Louis, Stella Chandler
- Louis, George Ah Him
- Louis, Mae
- Louis, Elsie
- Louis
- San Luis Obispo, CA
- Book
- Photograph
- Receipt
- Document

[Collection Box List](#)