ARTHUR BROWN COLLECTION

Finding aid created by California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives staff using RecordEXPRESS

California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives

111 I Street

Sacramento, California 95814

(916) 323-8073

Library.CSRM@parks.ca.gov

http://www.csrmf.org/

2017

Descriptive Summary

Title: ARTHUR BROWN COLLECTION

Dates: 1861-1907

Collection Number: MS 486

Creator/Collector: Brown, Arthur (1830-1917)

Extent: 1 oversize box + 1 half-box

Repository: California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives

Sacramento, California 95814

Abstract: Contains correspondence written to Arthur Brown and collected by him during the course of his career as Superintendent of Buildings and Bridges with the Central Pacific Railroad Company during the building of the transcontinental railroad and later for the Southern Pacific Railroad Company throughout its early years of expansion.

Language of Material: English

Access

This collection is open for research at our off-site storage facility with one week's notice. Contact Library & Archives staff to arrange for access.

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

Purchased from Nancy Leigh Olmsted, 2001.

Biography/Administrative History

Arthur Brown was one of the principle architects and bridge builders of the Central Pacific Railroad Company's transcontinental line. He supervised and planned much of the construction of the Southern Pacific Line into the 1890s. Arthur Brown was born in the village of Kentore near Aberdeen in Scotland in 1830. He was brought to Canada by his widowed mother, and he grew up in Ottawa, Ontario. As a young man he assisted his uncle, Alexander Christie, in the railroad construction of bridges and culverts. The two men moved west to British Columbia, where one of Brown's first construction projects was a pier. In 1864, Brown moved to California, and in 1865 began work for Central Pacific Railroad under James Harvey Strobridge, Superintendent of Construction. In one month he was promoted to the position of Superintendent of Bridges and Buildings, a position he held until after the transcontinental line was finished and much of the Southern Pacific line had been built. Brown was responsible for supervising construction and preparing plans. He was a well-known and respected builder of bridges. In 1868, an ambitious undertaking by Brown and the 2,500 men assigned to help him led to the construction of a series of snowsheds in just five months. Brown also designed and helped build other structures for the railroad including the Oakland Mole, and stations at Alta and San Francisco. He provided drawings for boats such as the ferryboat "Solano." Brown also constructed the San Francisco mansions of Charles Crocker and Leland Stanford and the original Del Monte Hotel in Monterey. Brown retired in the early 1890s and died on March 7, 1917. He was survived by his wife, Victoria Runyon Brown.

Scope and Content of Collection

Notable correspondents include: Leland Stanford (1824-1893), Mark Hopkins (1813-1878), and Charles Crocker (1822-1888). Some of the letters illustrate his friendship with Samuel Skerry Montague, various craftsmen, suppliers, and engineers. Biographical information about Arthur Brown, including excerpts from several books, and a photocopy of a transcript from Arthur Brown's testimony before the Pacific Railroad Commission in 1888, has been placed at the beginning of the collection. Organized chronologically by date. Box 1 contains photocopies of the letters. Box 2 contains the original letters. As the originals are very fragile, access is restricted.

MS 486 Arthur Brown Collection [Complete finding aid]