Sonoma County Grand Jury records, 1896-2009

Finding aid author: Mark Cooper.

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Published Feb 28, 2011
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Sonoma County Grand Jury records, 1896-2009

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Overview of the Collection

Collection Title: Sonoma County Grand Jury records,
Date (inclusive): 1896-2009
Identification: SCG.00014
Creator: California. Grand Jury (Sonoma County)
Physical Description: 63 volumes
Language of Materials: English
Repository: Sonoma County Library Archives
c/o Sonoma County History and Genealogy Library, Sonoma County Library
725 Third Street
Santa Rosa, CA,
URL: https://sonomalibrary.org/locations/sonoma-county-history-and-genealogy-library/sonoma-county-archive
Email: history@sonomalibrary.org
Phone: (707) 308-3212


Biography/Organization History

A Grand Jury derives its name from the fact that it usually has a greater number of jurors than a trial (petit) jury. One of the earliest concepts of Grand Juries dates back to early Greece where the Athenians used an accusatory body. In early Britain, the Saxons also used something similar to a Grand Jury System. During the years 978 to 1016, one of the Dooms (laws) stated that for each 100 men, 12 were to be named to act as an accusing body. They were cautioned "not to accuse an innocent man or spare a guilty one."

The Grand Jury can also be traced to the time of the Norman conquest of England in 1066. There is evidence that the courts of that time summoned a body of sworn neighbors to present crimes that had come to their knowledge. Since the members of that accusing jury were selected from small jurisdictions, it was natural that they could present accusations based on their personal knowledge.

Historians agree that the Assize [court session or assembly] of Clarendon in 1166 provided the ground work for our present Grand Jury system. During the reign of Henry II (1154-1189), to regain for the crown the powers usurped by Thomas Becket, Chancellor of England, 12 "good and lawful men" in each village were assembled to reveal the names of those suspected of crimes. It was during this same period that juries were divided into two types, civil and criminal, with the development of each influencing the other.

The oath taken by these jurors provided that they would carry out their duties faithfully, that they would aggrrieve no one through enmity nor deference to anyone through love, and that they would conceal those things that they had heard.

By the year 1290, these accusing juries were given the authority to inquire into the maintenance of bridges and highways, defects of jails, and whether the Sheriff had kept in jail anyone who should have been brought before the justices. "Le Grand Inquest" evolved during the reign of Edward III (1368), when the "accusatory jury" was increased in number from 12 to 23, with a majority vote necessary to indict anyone accused of crime.

In America, the Massachusetts Bay Colony impaneled the first Grand Jury in 1635 to consider cases of murder, robbery and wife beating. As early as 1700, the value of the Grand Jury was recognized as opposing the Royalists. These colonial Grand Juries expressed their independence by refusing to indict leaders of the Stamp Act (1765), and refusing to bring libel charges against the editors of the Boston Gazette (1765). A union with other colonies to oppose British taxes was supported by the Philadelphia Grand Jury in 1770.

By the end of the Colonial Period, the Grand Jury had become an indispensable adjunct of Government: "they proposed new laws, protested against abuses in government, and wielded the tremendous authority in their power to determine who should and who should not face trial."
Public support for Grand Juries, sustained through the Revolutionary Period, began to wane in the early 1800’s. Adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, made it illegal to “deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law.” As interpreted by some states, this amendment no longer required prosecution of crimes by Grand Jury indictment nor prohibited direct accusation by a prosecutor. California is still one of the states that allows prosecution to be initiated by either a Criminal Grand Jury indictment or judicial preliminary hearing.

Sonoma County does not impanel a Criminal Grand Jury. If the Civil Grand Jury ascertains that there is an indictable offense, then a separate Criminal Grand Jury will be impaneled.

The first California Penal Codes contained statutes providing for a Grand Jury, to be impaneled quarterly, at the same time as the trial jurors were drawn. Early Grand Juries investigated local prisons, conducted audits of county books and pursued matters of community interest. The role of the Grand Jury in California is unique. The statutes passed in 1880 allowed their duties to include investigation of county government by a Grand Jury beyond alleged misconduct of public officials. Only California and Nevada mandate that Grand Juries be impaneled annually to function specifically in a watchdog capacity over county government.

Scope and Contents
Official records of the Sonoma County Grand Jury.

Arrangement of the collection
Organized into five series:
3. Minutes, 1919
4. Records, 1934-1948
5. The people, etc. vs. Gus Meier - Grand Jury Proceedings, 1917

Series 1-4 arranged chronologically.

Access Terms
This Collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Corporate Names
California. Grand Jury (Sonoma County)

Geographic Name:
Sonoma County (Calif.)--Politics and government

Title:
Report of Sonoma County Grand Jury Final report of Sonoma County Grand Jury

Topical Terms
Crime--California--Sonoma County
County government--California--Sonoma County
Grand jury--California--Sonoma County
Grand jury--California--Sonoma County Periodical

Genre and Format Terms
Minutes (administrative records)
Official reports
Criminal court records
Civil court records
Judicial records
County government records
State government records
Archival materials

Conditions Governing Access:
Materials stored offsite, but collection is open to research. In many cases, further details on individual volumes can be found by calling staff at the Sonoma County History and Genealogy Library. To view these materials, please call staff at 707 308-3212 to request they be brought from the Archives to the Library
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Preferred Citation:
Sonoma County Grand Jury records, 1918-2009. SCG.00014, Sonoma County Archives, Sonoma County Library, Rohnert Park, California.

**SCL Special Collections Control Number:** SCG.00014.01

**Series 1. Report of the Sonoma County Grand Jury 1918-1940**

Note:
Series content list:
1918: ARCHIVES Cabinet 12: Reports and responses: Accession 1505
1919: ARCHIVES Cabinet 12: Reports and responses: Accession 1506
1930-1950: ARCHIVES ROW 11 BIN 22: Reports and responses:
1939-40: CENTRAL CLOSED STACKS CS R 345.79418: Reports and responses:

Physical Description:
Extent: 4 volumes

Scope and Contents
Released annually. Description based on: 1939-1940; title from cover. Latest issue consulted: 1939-1940
Note that volume for 1939-1940 shelved in Central Closed Stacks, rather than with other in the Archives.

**SCL Special Collections Control Number:** SCG.00014.02

**Series 2. Sonoma County Grand Jury ... final report 1948-2009**

Note:
Series content list:
1948-1951: ANNEX R 345.79418: Reports and responses:

Physical Description:
Extent: 56 volumes

Scope and Contents
SCL Special Collections Control Number: SCG.00014.03

Series 3. Minutes 1919

Note:
Series content list:
1919 : ARCHIVES CABINET 37 : Minutes : Accession 2719

Note:
Minutes are not limited to 1919: see Records, etc.
Physical Description:
Extent: 1 volume
Scope and Contents
Description based on: 1919

SCL Special Collections Control Number: SCG.00014.04

Series 4. Records 1934-1948

Note:
Series content list:
1934-1948 : ARCHIVES CABINET 37 : Records : Accession 2740

Physical Description:
Extent: 1 volume
Scope and Contents
Minutes of the Grand Jury from July 6 1934, to Jan. 26 1948

SCL Special Collections Control Number: SCG.00014.05

Series 4. The people, etc. vs. Gus Meier -- Grand Jury Proceedings 1917
Accession no: 2787

Note:
Series content list:
1917 : ARCHIVES CABINET 38 : The people, etc. vs. Gus Meier : Accession 2787

Physical Description:
Extent: 1 volume