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## **Albert Kimsey Owen Letters and Documents: Finding Aid**

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## Overview of the Collection

**Title:** Albert Kimsey Owen Letters and Documents

**Dates (inclusive):** 1885-1909

**Collection Number:** mssAKO 1-198

**Creator:** Owen, Albert Kimsey.

**Extent:** 418 pieces in 2 boxes

**Repository:** The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Manuscripts Department

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**Abstract:** This collection consists of documents and letters (mainly contemporary copies, some of which are in Spanish) related to Utopian reformer Albert K. Owen (1848-1916), the rise and fall of the Topolobampo utopian colony in Sinaloa, Mexico (1886-ca. 1903), and railroad development in Mexico under the regime of Porfirio Díaz.

**Language:** English.

### Access

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### Preferred Citation

[Identification of item]. Albert Kimsey Owen Letters and Documents, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

### Provenance

Purchased from Ray Reynolds in July 1964, April, 1974, and May 1974.

### Biographical Note

Albert Kimsey Owen (1848-1916), born in Chester, Pennsylvania, son of a Quaker physician, was a utopian reformer and founder of a co-operative community in Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. By profession Owen was a civil engineer. He went to Colorado to survey a railroad route, then on to Mexico to help lay out what was to become the Mexican Central Railroad. Upon first seeing Topolobampo Bay in 1873, Owen's dream was to found the perfect city, a colony based on cooperative principles, complete with workers, artisans, and intellectuals, to be supplied by a railroad line from the United States, with entry at El Paso, across the Sierra Madred mountains, to the Bay of Topolobampo. Since this would be the shortest route to the Pacific from the great industrial cities of the United States, he envisioned Topolobampo as a center for the Pacific trade. In 1881 Owen was granted a concession by the Mexican government to form a company to be known as the Texas, Topolobampo and Pacific Railway and Telegraph Company. Officers from 1883-1889 were William Windom, president; Ulysses S. Grant, Jr., vice-president; and Owen, engineer. In 1885 the name was changed to the American and Mexican Pacific Railroad. On November 17, 1887 the first of the colonists arrived and began building houses and irrigation systems. The first railroad concession lapsed without a railroad constructed, and a new concession was granted in 1890, then renewed to 1897, to be known as the Mexican Western Railroad Company. Owen tried desperately to interest Alexander R. Shepherd, former governor of Washington, D.C. and owner of the Batopilas mine in Mexico, and A. Foster Higgins, who built the Rio Grande, Sierra Madre & Pacific Railroad from El Paso to Casas Grandes, Mexico, in continuing that railroad line across the mountains to Topolobampo.

In the meantime difficulties developed among the colonists. The Kansas-Sinaloa Investment Company headed by C. B. Hoffman had been formed to purchase land for the colony. The colonists split into two groups, one loyal to Owen, favorable to cooperative policies; the other loyal to Hoffman and preferring private land ownership. There was litigation over the irrigation canal and water rights. By 1900 the colony had almost collapsed; by 1903 Owen was no longer part of any plan. Arthur Edward Stillwell took up the railroad concessions and built the Kansas City, Mexico and Orient Railroad. Benjamin Franics Johnston acquired most of the land and developed the sugar industry.

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Owen was a prolific writer. In addition to his works on Integral Co-operation and the Credit Foncier Company, he wrote articles and pamphlets (many of which are in the Rare Book Department of the Huntington Library) on Woman's suffrage, Currency questions, and, in later years, the auto-highway.

Although Owen never was able to bring his utopian dream to fulfillment, before his death two railroads were built where he once had concessions, and the desert land was turned into a rich agricultural center.

### **Bibliography**

Bernard, L. L. and Jessie. *Origins of American Sociology*. 1943, pp. 359-371. (HM 22 U5 B4)

*Credit Foncier of Sinaloa*. April 5, 1887 (and other issues) (274745)

Higgins, J. Wallace. The Orient Road *The Railway and Locomotive Historical Society*, Bulletin 95. Oct. 1956, pp. 10-46

Kneeland, Clarrissa Abia. Reminiscences of the Credit Foncier Colony *Fresno Clarion*. 1945-1946. Film 328

Owen, Albert Kimsey. *Integral Co-operation*. 1885. pp. 199-206. HX 661 T6 09

Robertson, Thomas A. *A Southwestern Utopia*. 1947. F 1391 T64 R6

- [Albert Kimsey Owen Papers](#). (Call number: mssOwen)

### **Scope and Content**

This collection consists of documents and letters (mainly contemporary copies, some of which are in Spanish) related to Albert Kimsey Owen, the rise and fall of the Topolobampo utopian colony in Sinaloa, Mexico (1886-ca. 1903), and railroad development in Mexico under the regime of Porfirio Díaz. Correspondents represented in the collection include: Porfirio Díaz, Albert M. Gibson, Edward Everett Hale, and Alexander Robey Shepherd.

The letters are carbon copies written by hand on very thin paper, probably contemporary copies made for the colony by E. M. Hussey, with a few signatures and notes that may be in the writing of Owen himself. Articles and other documents, and letters copied after 1899 are generally typewritten.

Correspondents include:

- Ames, Oliver: 1896(1)
- Baker, Arthur: 1896 (1)
- Boies, Horace: 1896 (1)
- Bolling & Lowe: 1891 (1)
- Boynton, S. C.: 1890 (1); 1891 (1)
- Breidenthal, [John?]: 1891 (1)
- Brodie, Walter M.: 1896 (6)
- Brown, Frank M.: 1889 (1)
- Buck, E. A.: 1885 (1)
- Burr, I. T.: 1889 (1)
- Butterfield, A.: 1896 (1)
- Campbell, James: 1885 (1)
- Cañedo, Francisco: 1895 (2); 1893 (1)
- Caryl, Charles W.: 1896 (5)
- Case, Lyman W.: 1891 (1)
- Couvet, R. M.: 1897 (1)
- Crosby, J. F.: 1895 (4)
- D[awkins], I[da] H[oagland]: 1895 (1); 1897 (1)
- Dewees, F. P.: 1895 (1)
- Díaz, Porfirio: 1895 (1); 1896 (3)
- Doyle, Kinsley Dryden: 1896 (1); 1897 (2)
- Ellsworth, B. H.: 1891 (1)
- Fernandez y Leal, Manuel (addressee): 1890 (2); 1893 (1); 1896 (1)
- Flurscheim, Michael
- (subject) 1893 (1): 1896 (1)
- Free, Morris: 1895 (2)
- Freeman, James H.: 1892 (1)

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- García, Telesforo: 1896 (1)
  - Gibson, Albert M.: 26 items including: 1895 (2); 1896 (2); 1897 (3)
  - Gilson, Walter C.: 1885 (1)
  - Grant, J[esse] R.: 1889 (1)
  - addressee 1896 (1)
  - Graves, Edward C.: 1890 (1)
  - Gregory, William G.: 1896 (1)
  - Hale, Edward Everett: 1889 (1)
  - Hampl, Joseph: 1895 (3); 1896 (11); 1897 (4)
  - Hampson: 1896 (1)
  - Harris, Thomas Lake: 1897 (2)
  - Hart, H[enry] A.: 1896 (1)
  - Herrera, Eduardo S.: 1890 (4); 1891 (1); 1897 (2)
  - Higgins, A. Foster: 1896 (3)
  - Hoffman, C[hristian] B.: 1891 (1)
  - Holbrook, H[enry] R.: 1890, (1)
  - Howland, Marie: 1889 (1); 1891 (1)
  - Humphreys, Solon: 1896 (2)
  - Jorgenson, E. W. A.: 1896 (1)
  - Kellogg, Frederic R.: 1891 (1); 1896 (1)
  - Kendall, R. J.: 1895 (2)
  - Kneeland, George S.: 1896 (2)
  - Lamb, C. J.: 1888 (1)
  - Law, Albert: 1893 (1)
  - Lovell, John W.: 1891 (1); 1896 (1); 1897 (4)
  - MacBride, T[homas] R.: 1896 (2)
  - McKinley, William  
(addressee) 1896 (1)
  - Miks, Amos L.: 1895 (1)
  - Obregan, R.: 1896 (1)
  - Ortiz, José M.: 1893 (1)
  - Page, George L.: 1895 (1)
  - Patrick, H[erbert]: 1889 (2); 1890 (1)
  - Patten, William L.: 1892 (1)
  - Putnam, M. C.: 1893 (1)
  - Quay, Matthey Stanley: 1896 (1)
  - Retes, Charles: 1893 (1); 1894 (1)
  - Rice, John H.: 1885 (1); 1891 (1); 1897 (3)
  - Robinson, C[harles] T.: 1890 (1)
  - Romero, M[atías]: 1890 (1); 1891 (1); 1892 illegible text
  - Shaw, D. F.: 1896 (1)
  - Shepherd, Alexander R[obey]: 1895 (2); 1896 (2)
  - Snow, Zera: 1896 (1)
  - Stanton, D. N.: 1889 (1)
  - Stephenson, J[oseph] Gurden L[eycester]: 1896 (2); 1897 (1)
  - Streeter, A. J.: 1895 (3); 1896 (2)
  - Sutherland, W. J.: 1890 (1)
  - Tays, E[ugene] A. H.: 1888 (1); 1896 (1)

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- Tronson, Norman: 1896 (1)
  - Wells, Junius F.: 1896 (2)
  - Wilber, Alvin J.: 1891 (2); 1892 (2); 1893 (1); 1896 (2)
  - Wilson, Angeline: 1889 (1)
  - Wotherspoon, W. A.: 1893 (1)

Some notable items include:

- Hale, Edward Everett. Letter declining to invest with group, though sympathizing with their ideals.
- Date: Sep. 30, 1889
- Grant, Jesse R. (son of Ulysses S. Grant). His attempts to raise money for the railroad. Date: Oct. 12, 1889
- Owen, Albert Kimsey. History of the Credit Foncier Co. (37 pages). Date: Aug. 1, 1893
- Owen, Albert Kimsey. History of the Topolobampo Colony (32 pages). Date: Mar. 15, 1894
- Kneeland, George S., et. al. Memorial to Porfirio Díaz re. the status of the colony. Date: Aug. 22, 1896
- Proposed agreement with A. K. Owen to sell his interests to John W. Lovell and/or Thomas Lake Harris. Date: Apr. 21, 1897

#### **Arrangement**

Arranged alphabetically.

#### **Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the [Huntington Library's Online Catalog](#).

#### **Subjects**

Díaz, Porfirio, 1830-1915.

Owen, Albert Kimsey.

Topolobampo and Pacific Railroad and Telegraph Company.

Cooperative societies -- Mexico -- Sinaloa (State)

Railroads -- Mexico -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.

Railroads -- Mexico -- History -- 20th century -- Sources.

Utopias -- Mexico -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.

Sinaloa (Mexico : State) -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.

Topolobampo (Mexico)

Topolobampo (Mexico) -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.

#### **Forms/Genres**

Letters (correspondence) Mexico.

#### **Alternate Authors**

Díaz, Porfirio, 1830-1915.

Gibson, A. M. (Albert M.)

Hale, Edward Everett, Jr., 1863-1932.

Shepherd, Alexander Robey, 1835-1902.

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Box 1

**A-Owen (Díaz) (AKO 1-108)**

Box 2

**Owen (to Doyle)-W and miscellaneous (AKO 109-198)**