Guide to the Great Registers of San Joaquin County (California) GovRec5

Finding aid prepared by Gail Erwin
San Joaquin County Historical Society & Museum 2020 August 4
Abstract: This collection of 68 bound volumes and one oversize flat box holds some of the earliest voter registration records of San Joaquin County. The Registry Act of 1866 that mandated them was the first attempt to reform a corrupted voting process in California. The collection is comprised of Great Registers or their copies dated 1866-1912, and Indexes to the Great Registers dated 1890-1946. The oversize box contains partial copies of the Great Registers of 1868, 1871, 1877, 1896, 1898, and 1906.

creator: San Joaquin County (Calif.).

Restrictions
No access or copyright restrictions.

Access Information
Collection is open for research by appointment

Extent
40 linear feet

Preferred Citation
[Volume title and year], Great Registers of San Joaquin County (California), GovRec5, San Joaquin County Historical Society and Museum, Lodi, California

Historical Background
The original California State Constitution, ratified in November 1849, stated in Article II: “All elections by the people shall be by ballot.” However, no electoral procedures were specified. For the first sixteen years of California’s statehood, politics were often rampant with corruption. In the post-Gold Rush state, political machines gained power and, though bringing some order, demanded loyalty at the polls in return for the favors they gave. Political parties printed their own ballots, and one’s vote often was not private. Ballot boxes could be stuffed with the votes of non-existent or ineligible voters, or a voter might vote more than once. A vote might be bought outright. Passed in 1866, the Registry Act (Statutes of California, Chapter CCLXV) represented the first attempt to reform the voting process by requiring the names of every voter to be listed in a book of voter affidavits. These affidavits were called the Great Registers.

The Registry Act was “an Act to provide for the registration of the citizens of this State, and for the enrolment [sic] in the several election districts of all the legal voters thereof, and for the prevention and punishment of frauds affecting the elective franchise.” The responsibility for the implementation of this act fell to the County Clerks of the state, who were to record in a Great Register “all the citizens ...who are, or may be within six months, by reason of continuous residence, legal voters thereof ...” The entries to be made for each voter included full name, age, country of nativity, occupation, place of residence, date of registry, and number of entry. A naturalized foreigner was required to provide proof with certificate of when, where, and by what court he received citizenship, or by the testimony of two registered citizens of his residence in the United States for five years and in California for one year. Each person registered was noted as “duly sworn.”

The California Political Code of 1872 established re-registration of voters in each even-numbered year. Registration began on January 1 of the year and continued until forty days before an election. Within five days of the closing of registration, the county clerk was required to prepare an alphabetical index of the Great Register for that year and print at least one hundred copies. Within fifteen days, he was to print bound affidavits of registration, with duplicates, for each precinct. The clerk then transmitted one book of affidavits and five copies of the index to the board of election in each county precinct. (Title II, Registration of Electors, Chapter III, Sections 1094, 1113, 1115.) Some counties had created printed, alphabetical copies of the manuscript ledgers prior to this time; this collection includes printed copies from 1867, 1868, and 1871 in full or partial form.

Subsequent laws refined the use of the Great Registers. In 1892, physical descriptions were included. In 1896, a voter’s occupation, specific address, head of household, and precinct were added, as well as whether he could read the Constitution in English, write his name, and mark his ballot. If unable, the nature of his disability was recorded.

The information became more simplified by 1900, when a number, name, age, and address were listed. Occupation was added back in 1906, and in 1908 one’s party affiliation was included. Women in California were given the right to vote in
1911; the 1912 registers recorded sex and age, but these were dropped in later registers.
California’s Political Code was amended in 1909 to permit a discontinuance of the manuscript Great Registers, though San Joaquin County continued to create them until 1912.

Scope and Contents
This collection of San Joaquin County records is arranged chronologically and by subject, and spans the years 1866 to 1946. It includes the following material: Series 1, Great Registers of San Joaquin County, 1866-1912; Series 2, Indexes to the Great Registers, 1890-1946; Series 3, Partial Copies, 1868-1906.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
San Joaquin County (Calif.)
San Joaquin County (Calif.)--History
Voting registers--California--Indexes.
Voting registers--California--San Joaquin County

Series 1: Great Registers of San Joaquin County 1866-1912
Scope and Content Note
50 bound volumes. Includes original handwritten registers and five typed copies.

Great Register, 1866-1871
Copy, Great Register, 1867
Great Register, 1871-1878
Great Register, 1879-1885
Great Register, M-Z, 1879-1885
Copy, Great Register for San Joaquin County, October 7, 1882
Copy, Great Register, 1882
Copy, Great Register, 1884
Great Register, A-L, 1886
Great Register, W-Z, 1886-1890
Great Register, Supplement, 1890-1891
Copy, Great Register, 1890
Great Register, A-D, 1892
Great Register, E-L, 1892
Great Register, M-R, 1892
Great Register, S-Z, 1892
Great Register, A-E, 1896
Great Register, F-L, 1896
Great Register, M-R, 1896
Great Register, S-Z, 1896
Great Register, Supplement, 1896-1898
Great Register, Supplement, 1897-1899
Great Register, A-D, January 1, 1900
Great Register, E-K, January 1, 1900
Great Register, L-Q, January 1, 1900
Great Register, R-Z, January 1, 1900
Great Register, A-D, January 2, 1902
Great Register, E-K, January 2, 1902
Great Register, L-Q, January 2, 1902
Great Register, R-Z, January 2, 1902
Great Register, A-D, January 4, 1904
Great Register, E-K, January 4, 1904
Great Register, L-Q, January 4, 1904
Great Register, R-Z, January 4, 1904
Great Register, A-D, January 4, 1906
Great Register, E-K, January 4, 1906
Great Register, L-Q, January 4, 1906
Great Register, R-Z, January 4, 1906
Great Register, A-D, January 1, 1908
Great Register, E-K, January 1, 1908
Great Register, L-Q, January 1, 1908
Great Register, R-Z, January 1, 1908
Great Register, A-D, January 1, 1910
Great Register, E-K, January 1, 1910
Great Register, L-Q, January 1, 1910
Great Register, R-Z, January 1, 1910
Great Register, A-D, January 1, 1912
Great Register, E-K, January 1, 1912
Great Register, L-Q, January 1, 1912
Great Register, R-Z, January 1, 1912

Series 2: Indexes to Great Registers of San Joaquin County 1890-1946

Scope and Content Note

17 bound volumes, and one binder containing photocopies of the index.

Index to Great Register, 1890; photocopy in binder
Index to Great Register, 1904
Index to Great Register, 1908
Index to Great Register, 1914
Index to Great Register, 1916
Index to Great Register, 1918
Index to Great Register, 1920
Index to Great Register, 1922
Index to Great Register, 1924
Index to Great Register, 1926
Index to Great Register, 1928
Index to Great Register, 1930
Index to Great Register, 1932
Index to Great Register, 1936, 2 copies
Index to Great Register, 1938
Index to Great Register, 1942
Index to Great Register, 1946

Series 3: Partial copies 1868-1906

Scope and Content Note

Contains six fragile printed copies of the Great Registers of 1868, 1871, 1877, 1896, 1898, and 1906; these records do not have covers and are torn or show water damage.

Copy, Great Register, 1868
Copy, Great Register, 1871
Copy, Great Register, 1877
Copy, Great Register, 1896
Copy, Great Register, 1898
Copy, Great Register, 1906