
Guide to the C. E. French Letter Books MS.R.138

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Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries

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Contributing Institution: Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries

Title: C. E. French Letter Books

Creator: French, C. E. (Charles Edwin)

Identifier/Call Number: MS.R.138

Physical Description: 0.4 Linear Feet(1 box)

Date (inclusive): 1884-1896

Abstract: The collection comprises bound copies of outgoing letters written by C. E. French, an entrepreneur who contributed significantly to the growth of Santa Ana, California during the mid to late 19th century. The letters refer to French's personal and business activities and reflect the concerns of Orange County residents preceding and immediately following the 1880s real estate boom. The letters include information about family matters, remittance for goods and services, real estate transactions, Irvine Ranch business, local transportation, Santa Ana community activities, and the attractive climate of Southern California.

Language of Material: English .

Access

The collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation

C. E. French Letter Books. MS-R138. Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California. Date accessed.

For the benefit of current and future researchers, please cite any additional information about sources consulted in this collection, including permanent URLs, item or folder descriptions, and box/folder locations.

Acquisition Information

Acquired, 2008

Processing History

Processed by Cyndi Shein, 2008.

Biography

Charles Edwin French was a resident of Santa Ana, California who contributed significantly to the city's growth during the mid to late 19th century. He actively promoted Santa Ana and the surrounding area as an ideal place to live and conduct business. Professionally, he facilitated real estate transactions, was postmaster of Santa Ana, and managed Irvine Ranch for a time. He was responsible for the construction of the original Irvine family ranch home in 1876. He was instrumental in establishing the first horse-drawn street car line in what is now Orange County and was named secretary of the Santa Ana, Orange, and Tustin Street Railway when it was incorporated in 1886.

In addition to his business ventures, French also supported the civic and cultural growth of the city. In 1878 he donated office space and a cabinet for books to begin the Santa Ana Public Library Association, with his wife, Emma French, acting as the city's first librarian. This library, along with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), transferred their holdings to the City of Santa Ana in 1891, at which time C. E. French was elected to the first public library board. He built French's Opera House, which opened in 1890 with a benefit for the Orphan's School in Anaheim, starring Madame Modjeska as Lady Macbeth. French Street, French Elementary School, and French Park (an exclusive residential neighborhood in early Santa Ana) were named for him and his family.

Collection Scope and Content Summary

The collection comprises bound copies of outgoing letters written by C. E. French of Santa Ana, California. The letters refer to French's personal and business activities and reflect the concerns of Orange County residents preceding and immediately following the 1880s real estate boom. The letters include information about family matters, remittance for goods and services, real estate transactions, Irvine Ranch business, local transportation, Santa Ana community activities, and the attractive climate of Southern California.

The letters bear the characteristics of letterpress copies. Letterpress copies are often on tissue paper and are produced by the transfer of ink through direct contact with the original, using moisture and pressure. In French's books, the ink is blurred where it was transferred onto overly damp paper and is faint where the paper was not damp enough.

The collection also includes typed versions of several letters transcribed by Phil Brigandi.

Collection Arrangement

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material. The letters are in chronological order.

Marsh, Diann. *Santa Ana: An Illustrated History*. Encinitas, CA: Heritage Publishing Co., 1994. Swanner, Charles D. *Santa Ana: A Narrative of Yesterday*. Claremont, Calif., Saunders Press, 1953.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Letterpress copies -- 19th century.

Letter books -- 19th century.

Santa Ana (Calif.) -- History -- Sources

French, C. E. (Charles Edwin) -- Archives

Letter books

box 1, folder 1

1884-1886

box 1, folder 2

1894-1896

Scope and Contents note

Some of the pages in this volume are severely creased and the chemicals in the ink have caused fading; the affected pages are fragile and difficult to read.

box 1, folder 3

Typed transcripts of selected letters completed by Phil Brigandi undated