
Adolph Sutro Papers, 1849-1984

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California State Library. Sutro Library

SFSU - J. Paul Leonard Library

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Adolph Sutro Papers, 1849-1984

Dates: 1849-1984

Collection Number: 000555407

Creator/Collector:

Extent: 24 manuscript boxes, 7 flat boxes, and 9 linear feet of books and other bound volumes.

Repository: California State Library. Sutro Library

San Francisco, California 94132-4030

Abstract: Consists of correspondence, books, receipts, ephemera, printed matter, and photographs relating to the Anti-Railroad Funding Bill, Sutro's book buying activities, San Francisco mayoral campaign, Sutro Baths, Sutro Heights, and the Sutro Tunnel.

Language of Material: English

Access

Please contact the Sutro Library to arrange a time to research the collection.

Publication Rights

The library can only claim physical ownership of the collection. Users are responsible for satisfying any claimants of literary property.

Preferred Citation

Adolph Sutro Papers, 1849-1984. California State Library. Sutro Library

Biography/Administrative History

Adolph Sutro was a German Jewish immigrant who came to San Francisco from Prussia in 1850 at a time of tumult and revolution in Western Europe. He left both to avoid conscription in the military, and to seek opportunity in the United States. Along with his family, he boarded a steamship and headed to New York, and from here, like many young men, he headed to San Francisco, California and to the gold fields. Sutro arrived in San Francisco and found his gold, not in the mines, but in various business ventures in and around the city, eventually making his fortune by founding the eponymous Sutro Tunnel Company and then later investing in real estate. The tunnel, which Sutro engineered, was designed to drain the Comstock Lode mines of water, hot steam, and hazardous gas, but also to transport materials and men to and from the mines. And while Sutro spent many years raising capital, securing investors, and lobbying Congress, the tunnel had little relevance as it coincided with end of the Comstock's boom. Sutro managed to profit from the tunnel company by selling stock before it went bust, and he eventually returned to San Francisco to settle down. Beginning in the 1880s Sutro purchased close to one-twelfth of the real property in the city, investments which would amass an even greater fortune for him. Adolph Sutro used his fortune to help shape San Francisco into a major urban center. Today, his imprint can be seen in numerous landmarks and places throughout the city, such as the Sutro Baths, the Cliff House, Outside Lands, as well as the 81 acres of open space that make up Mount Sutro. In addition to this, Sutro planned California's first Arbor Day along with famed poet Joaquin Miller; fought a battle with Huntington and "the Octopus"; and became the 24th mayor of San Francisco, as well as one of the first German-Jewish mayors in the United States. He crossed paths with prominent men of the day, such as Mark Twain, William Jennings Bryan, Andrew Carnegie, Denis Kearney, Oscar Wilde, and then President of the United States Benjamin Harrison. Sutro was a man of the people and a committed philanthropist. Part of his civic duty was directed towards building a public research library modeled after German Universities. His hope was that it would rival the best research collections in the world and his plan was to donate this library to the city of San Francisco. Unfortunately, the mayoral campaign and Sutro's declining health made it so that a building was never erected. The collection which, was stored in two locations in downtown San Francisco, was, at the time of Sutro's death in 1898, probably the largest private library in the world with somewhere between 250,000 to 400,000 tomes. In 1906, the earthquake and subsequent fire destroyed approximately two-thirds of the collection. Even so, what did survive and what exists today as part of the California State Library-Sutro Library, is rich and significant and houses unique manuscript collections as well as rare books like Shakespeare's First Folio. Sutro's family donated the collection to the State of California in 1913 with the stipulation that the collection never leave the city limits of San Francisco.

Scope and Content of Collection

The majority of the collection consists of correspondence surrounding the Sutro Tunnel Company, documents relating to Sutro's real estate purchases, and receipts documenting book purchases. There are also a large number of letters to and from Sutro family members.

[Sutro Manuscripts](#)