
Register of the Conant Collection of Central Valley Land Papers, 1861-1872

Collection number: Mss21

Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Conant Collection of Central Valley Land Papers,

Date (inclusive): 1861-1872

Collection number: Mss21

Creator: Lawrence Conant

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Shelf location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the library's online catalog.

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Access

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Biography

A native of Delaware, L. M. Hickman spent much of his life in Stockton. Hickman's name first appears in the Stockton Directory (1856), where he is listed as operating a hardware store with H.D. Saunders. This firm, which was located on Main Street between Hunter and El Dorado, sold cutlery, tin, copper, sheet iron, stoves and miners' tools and performed "all kinds of job work done at shortest notice." During the 1850s Hickman was a member of the Protection Hook & Ladder #1 volunteer fire fighters. In 1857 he was a founding member of the Stockton

Episcopal Church.

In 1860 Hickman married Mary Dallas, eldest daughter of Charles Dallas, proprietor of Stockton's first livery stable and, from 1850, owner of thousands of acres in Stanislaus county. Deeds for the considerable lands which Hickman purchased from his father-in-law are in this collection.

San Joaquin county historian, George Tinkham, provides a memoir of the Hickman-Dallas marriage that casts some light on Hickman's personality. The historian records that it was the custom for the volunteer fire companies to "serenade" newly-wed members on their wedding nights. When they arrived at Hickman's home, the firemen found the house dark, as though it were unoccupied. The "serenaders" nonetheless knew that Hickman and his bride were inside and so proceeded with their raucous performance. Tinkham writes that, "The bridegroom was a haughty young man and opposed to serenades when he was the object of them." Ultimately, the exasperated fire-fighters brought out their engine and sprayed a stream of water through Hickman's window. At this juncture, the bride and groom appeared and "Treated the crowd, but he never forgave them."

From 1864 Hickman was involved in Stockton politics. In that year he was elected alderman, in 1865 he was president of the city council and in 1867 and 1869 he was elected mayor. Hickman held the latter office during the time when the first railroad to proceed south from Stockton down the Valley was being planned. Several companies were formed for this purpose and the Stockton City Council heard proposals from each. The best offer came from Leland Stanford, who proposed to build seventy-five miles of track if Stockton would invest bonds of \$100,000 in his railroad. Mayor Hickman asked Stanford what he intended to charge for freight and fares. George Tinkham writes that Stanford replied, "None of your damn business!" and stalked out of the meeting.

L.M. Hickman must have learned enough from these discussions to know where to buy lands along the most likely route. Many of the patents in this collection are for Stanislaus County properties that lie contiguous to the completed line. Hickman acquired them all in the spring of 1869. By 1871 a rail line had reached Stanislaus county. In 1891 the Southern Pacific Railroad named a stop "Hickman" because it lay on part of Lewis M. Hickman's lands.

John W. Mitchell was born in Connecticut of a long line of well-to-do farmers. He first came to California in the late 1850s and farmed in the Lodi area. In the mid-1860s Mitchell purchased lands along the San Joaquin River in western Stanislaus county and laid out the town of Paradise City. Stanislaus historian, Jack Brotherton, writes that Mitchell's object in founding this town "Was to establish a riverboat landing for the distribution of the immense harvest of grain that was, in the middle and late 1860s, reaching its greatest tonnage." Mitchell erected warehouses and a flour mill at Paradise City and sold many lots between and 1867 and 1869. In the latter year it became evident that a railroad would be built some ten miles to the east of Paradise City. Virtually the entire town moved overnight to a location along the rail line which came to be known as Modesto.

Fortunately, John Mitchell had purchased other lands further to the south which lay along the rail route. He may rightly be dubbed the founder of Turlock, for he built the first warehouse on the present site of that city. Mitchell also owned lands in the vicinity of Atwater and Livingston. He raised sheep on his newly acquired lands until they had effectively cleared them of brush and weeds, then he turned to wheat.

Mitchell early saw the importance of irrigation to southern Stanislaus county and helped to organize the Turlock Irrigation District. He was a director of the District for many years.

When the Southern Pacific railroad route became known, he, like Hickman, purchased additional lands. These--represented by land patents in this collection--lie, for the most part, in Merced county.

When the Southern Pacific reached his Turlock property in 1871 the company proposed to name a stop for Mitchell, but he modestly declined, suggesting instead the name Turlough (Turlock), after the city in County Mayo, Ireland from which one branch of his family originated. Tinkham characterizes Mitchell as "Plain, unassuming, kindly and helpful, and beloved as well as esteemed." He died in 1893.

Scope and Content

These documents all pertain to public lands in the central San Joaquin Valley. Virtually all of them represent holdings in eastern Stanislaus and Merced counties. Most date from the 1860s---the period of wheat cultivation and railroad expansion in that region. With few exceptions they represent the acquisitions of two men: Lewis M. Hickman and John W. Mitchell.

Box BOX 1: CENTRAL VALLEY LAND PAPERS 1861-1872

Deeds & Patents of Lewis M. Hickman N.B.--Date is 1869 unless otherwise indicated

-Stockton city lots [1861]

-Township 3 South, Range 11 East (Stanislaus Co.) Sect. 13, 23, 26 34, 35 [1867]

-T3SR12E (Stanislaus Co.) Sect. 19(3) [two 1867], 20(2), 21, 30 [1863]

-T4SR11E (Stanislaus Co.) Sect. 1(2) [one 1867], 5 [1867], 7(3) [1868], 8 [1868], 9 [1868], 11, 15 [deed, 1868], 17(2) [1868], 18 [1868], 27

-T4SR12E (Stanislaus Co.) Sect. 2 & 3 [deed]

-T5SR11E (Stanislaus Co.) Sect. 1, 12, 14(2)

Deeds & Patents of John W. Mitchell N.B.--Date is 1869 unless otherwise indicated

- Photocopy Maps showing holdings of JWM
- T5SR11E (Stanislaus Co.) Sect. 22, 28(2), 31(2)
- T6SR10E & R11E, Sect. 19 [1872] (Merced Co.) Sect. 19(2), 20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 29(4), 30(3), 31, 32, 33(2)
- T7SR16E & R13E, Sect. 1 (Merced Co.) Sect. 27, 28, 30, 31(3), 33(3)
- T8SR13E & 11E, Sect. 17 (Merced Co.) Sect. 13, 14(2), 15
- T8SR16E & T11SR17E, Sect. 6 (Merced Co.) Sect. 3(2), 4(4), 5(4), 6(3)
- Miscellaneous Patents of Other Individuals
 - John H. Carpenter, T3SR9E, Sect. 33 (Stanislaus Co.) & T4SR8E, Sect. 11 (Stanislaus Co.) [swamp & overflow lands]
 - David C. Filterer, T3SR12E [1861] (Stanislaus Co.) Sect. 30
 - Dallas & Garner, T4SR12E (Stanislaus Co.) Sect. 2(2) [one 1868], 4
 - William H. Blankenship, T5SR10E [1868] (Merced Co.) Sect. 24
 - J.W. Peer, T6SR9E (Merced Co.) Sect. 14
 - L. Howard, T6SR10E (Merced Co.) Sect. 1
 - N. Sposati, T6S10E (Merced Co.) Sect. 11, 15
 - Ferdinand Roseman, T6SR10E (Merced Co.) Sect. 27
 - B. Randall, T6SR11E [1872] (Merced Co.) Sect. 30