
Inventory of the Sylvester Allen Ballou Papers, 1836-1968, bulk 1855-1899

The Huntington Library

San Marino, California

Contact Information

- Manuscripts Department
- The Huntington Library
- 1151 Oxford Road
- San Marino, California 91108
- Phone: (626) 405-2203
- Fax: (626) 449-5720
- Email: lgarcia@huntington.org
- URL: <http://www.huntington.org/huntingtonlibrary.aspx?id=554>

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Sylvester Allen Ballou Papers,

Date (inclusive): 1836-1968,

Date (bulk): bulk 1855-1899

Creator: Ballou, Sylvester Allen

Extent: Number of pieces: 150

Repository: The Huntington Library

San Marino, California 91108

Language: English

Provenance

Gift of Mrs. Albert Martin, Oct. 27, 1980

Access

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Preferred Citation

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Summary Report

Sylvester Allen Ballou (1828-1899) first came to California in 1849 from Ohio with his brother Volney in search of gold. Miner, trader, temperance advocate and school teacher while a resident of the Golden State, his active involvement in Democratic politics led him to serve four terms in the state legislature. A well-respected politician admired by colleagues and by the press, his career was marked in particular by his advocacy of Sacramento as permanent state capital and by his ardent support of popular sovereignty as a solution to the question of slavery in the territories. During the Civil War, he served in the Union Army's Department of Subsistence, being present at the siege of Vicksburg in 1863 and after war's end held the post of Chief Commissary in the Department of California for a year. Returning once more to the family home (now in Naperville, Illinois), he settled with his first wife, Julia Hills (Barnard) Ballou, who had accompanied him to California in 1865, until her death in 1869. Although he never again lived in California, he did return to the West several times, notably in 1873 when he revisited California and in 1879 when he participated in the Leadville, Colo. silver rush (without notable success). Returning to Naperville, he remained there with his family including his second wife, Eliza (Norton) Ballou, whom he had married in 1874, until his death in 1899.

The collection consists primarily of Sylvester Ballou's letters to various members of his family, assorted poems and public addresses prepared by Ballou, Ballou's diary of the year 1878 in Naperville, Ill. and his first wife Julia's diary of their sojourn in California during 1865 and 1866, letters written at different times by his brothers Orlando, Ray, and Volney, and a large amount of biographical data assembled by three of his granddaughters for a projected but uncompleted biography. The biographical materials include xerox copies of a number of letters and official records relating to his years in the California legislature and his military service, xeroxes of various pages from the *Plumas* (Co.) *Argus* between 1857 and 1860, and reproductions of several Leadville maps.

Subject matter

Politics and government in Civil War-era California, ocean travel to and from California in 1865 and 1866, mining in California and Colorado, farm life in Illinois, Ballou family history

Items of special interest

Orlando Ballou's letters to his friend Moses Morgan about gold mining in Plumas County, Calif. in 1855 and 1856 (HM 51212-51214) including one letter with a pictorial lettersheet of *The Miners' Ten Commandments* on verso (HM 51214), 6 letters written between 1858 and 1864 about California politics (HM 51215, HM 51247, HM 51249, HM 51257, HM 51258 and HM 51262), two letters by Sylvester Ballou at the time of the Vicksburg campaign (HM 51224 and FAC 1068), Julia (Barnard) Ballou's diary of her ocean voyage to California and her residence there with husband Sylvester in 1865-1866 (HM 51207), and Ballou's letters to his wife Eliza Anne (Norton) Ballou during his stay in Leadville (HM 51226-51238).

Ballou, Sylvester Allen

26 letters

Conness, John

6 letters

Bibliography

Apostol, Jane, Sylvester Allen Ballou: Argonaut in the Statehouse, *Pacific Historian* 27, 2 (Summer 1983)