
Register of the California & Nevada 19th c. Account Books, 1856-1892

Collection number: Mss24

Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections
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Contact Information

- Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections
- University Library, University of the Pacific
- Stockton, CA 95211
- Phone: (209) 946-2404
- Fax: (209) 946-2810
- URL: <http://www1.uop.edu/library/deptholt.html>

Processed by:

Don Walker

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Don Walker

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Descriptive Summary

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Biography

During the late 19th c. the Washoe Valley, located half way between Carson City and Reno, was a quiet agricultural region. A generation earlier the three principal villages in the valley--Franktown, Washoe City and Steamboat Springs--had been booming, due to the need for lumber and other goods and services at the nearby Comstock Lode in Virginia City. In 1866 Washoe City is said to have featured seventy stamp mills! During the 1860s, Washoe City was the county seat of Washoe County and Franktown, as the site of a large saw mill, was the

principal supplier of timber to Nevada's silver mines. When the Central Pacific Railroad was completed in 1869, however, Reno--which lay on the route--became the county seat. Soon afterward a spur line linked Virginia City with Reno. By 1881 Washoe City was "But the mournful relic of its former greatness," according to Thompson & West's History of Nevada.

The Washoe general merchandise store represented by the account books in this collection seems to have had an ample clientele. Among the companies with which the merchant did business were Levi Strauss, Oregon City Woolens, Standard Oil, the Star Lubricating Oil Works, the Commercial Soap Co., the Steamboat & Washoe Lake Canal Co. and Gammans' Woodchoppers. The names list of individual customers reads like a who's who of the early residents of the Washoe Valley. Eleven men and women with accounts at this store are mentioned in the Thompson & West history. Those biographed there include: George Smith, the Twaddle brothers, I.H. Ball, W.D. Harden, and A. Sauer.

William Morris, Justice of the Peace of Township #3, Contra Costa county, may also have operated a blacksmith shop earlier in the same region although research has connected only one name in Morris' accounts with other lists of Contra Costa county residents. None of his blacksmith shop customers are named in his court minutes. It is, therefore, likely that Morris' blacksmith business was located in a different town--quite possibly in a different county. Since the 1856 California directories tended to use initials in place of first names, it is very difficult to say whether the names in Morris' account book are those of men living in a particular county.

The Morris/Contra Costa County Justice Court records feature the names of several men mentioned in J.P. Munro-Fraser's History of Contra Costa County (1882). Among these are Joel Clayton, founder of the town of Clayton, Romero Mauvais, first hotelier in Clayton, Samuel Bacon, Charles Rhine, and Jerry Morgan, all important merchants and landowners in that part of Contra Costa county during the first two decades of its existence. These court records also bear witness to the importance at that time of coal mining in the region.

The Uniontown, El Dorado county blacksmith's accounts also reveal intense community involvement with mining--in this instance, copper mining. The copper boom was a short-lived phenomenon which affected much of the Sierra Nevada region during the Civil War. Eight different mining companies did business with this blacksmith, although Thompson & West's History of El Dorado County (1883) indicate that Uniontown was never more than a tiny hamlet with one or two stores and a single blacksmith's shop. Several of the individuals named in Thompson and West as residents of Uniontown were customers of the shop, including: J.A. Prague, who built the first bridge in Uniontown; H.K. Stow, who operated a store there; and, A. Lohry, who also owned a store and suggested the name "Lotus" to the U.S. Post Office in preference to "Uniontown." This account book is also a valuable source of information on the economic status of Chinese in the Civil War era Mother Lode.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of four account books. The first two of these were created during the early 1890s by a Washoe Valley, Nevada general merchandise store--possibly that operated during the 1880s by C.A. Lee of Franktown. The third account book was owned by William Morris, who worked as a blacksmith during 1856-57 and was later Justice of the Peace of Township #3 in Contra Costa County as is evidenced by the presence of Justice's Minutes (1865) in the same volume. The fourth book was created by a blacksmith in Uniontown (Lotus), El Dorado County, Calif. (1860-1863).

BOX ONE: WASHOE COUNTY GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORE, Vol. 1 (1889-91)

- 1.1 Index pages, A-Z [13 pp., about 250 names; "A" pg. is loose & laid in, "B" pg. has been slashed w/ razor along margin & is nearly loose]
- 1.2 Accounts [616 numbered pp.]

BOX TWO: WASHOE CO., NEV. & CALIF. ACCOUNT BOOKS

- 2.1 Washoe County General Merchandise Store: Day Book--June 5, 1891-January 20, 1892 [601 numbered pp.]
- 2.2 William Morris' Blacksmith Shop Day Book (1856-57; Twp #3 Contra Costa County Justice of the Peace Minutes (1865)
 - 1)Index pages, A-Z (for blacksmith accts.) [11 pgs.]
 - 2)Accounts [74 hand-numbered pp.]
 - 3)Justice of the Peace Minutes--Dockets #122-155 (Apr. 4, 1865-Jun. 30, 1865)[37 pp. mostly hand-numbered]
 - 4)blank pp. to end
 - 5)folder of scraps originally laid-in this volume [4 blacksmith recpts.; 1 Justice docket, Jul. 19, 1865]
- 2.3 Herrick Jacobs' [?] Blacksmith Shop Day Book, Uniontown (Lotus) Calif. (1860-1863)
 - 1)Index pages, A-Z [12 pgs.; 179 names, incl. 18 Chinese]
 - 2)Accounts [239 numbered pp.]
 - 3)George Rasmussen Personal Financial Records, Uniontown CA (1894-95)[numbered pp. 240-244]