

# History Center of San Luis Obispo County

THE ARCHIVES AT the History Center of San Luis Obispo County exemplify the variety of stories and characters that once walked our city streets. From the Dallidet family's scandalous trial to the letters describing the construction of Hearst Castle and beyond the collection offers a glimpse into the past that has distinctly shaped our community's present and future.

The History Center of San Luis Obispo County, now located at 696 Monterey Street in downtown San Luis Obispo, was established in 1953 to preserve the historic Dallidet Adobe. Owned by Paul Dallidet, the last remaining son of Pierre Hypolite Dallidet, San Luis Obispo's first commercial vintner and pioneer French settler, this house is a treasure of our county. However, our museum needed a larger space to share the collections with the public, and in 1956 the society began leasing San Luis Obispo's 1905 Carnegie Library, the same facility the History Center occupies today. The museum's collection spans over hundreds of years and thousands of topics, but the archives contain letters, photographs, and ephemera that can truly bring history to life.

After Paul Dallidet's passing in 1958, the History Center was gifted the entirety of the Dallidet Adobe. This gift included Maria Ascension Dallidet's paintings and sketches from her time studying at the art school at Mark Hopkins Institute in San Francisco, diaries from Louis Pascal Dallidet outlining daily life in San Luis Obispo and his time working in his father's winery, and photographs of life in the Aleutian Islands during the 1870s left with the family by the French explorer Alphonse Pinart.<sup>1</sup> The local newspapers in our collection, which date back to 1869, offer additional perspectives on the Dallidet fratricide that occurred in 1897 and the following court case that captivated the denizens of San Luis Obispo.

The founder of the local newspaper, Walter Murray, lived across the street from where the museum now stands, and a number of his materials are retained in our collection.<sup>2</sup> Daguerreotypes of his family depict the life of a man who, with a number of other local

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vigilantes, shot or hanged six men believed to have been outlaws, and he described the proceedings in the Vigilance Committee papers.<sup>3</sup>

Over the years San Luis Obispo continued to grow, and with the city and county assessment rolls researchers are able to gauge the changes in property ownership in the area. Names like Louis and Cattaneo began to appear on the assessment rolls and in the newspapers as the county received new immigrants. The Louis family collections include photographs depicting the lives of this Chinese-American family, the books and notes from Young Louis who worked as a photographer in town and projectionist for William Randolph Hearst at Hearst Castle, and souvenirs and ephemera spanning from the 1850s to the 1950s.

For those with a greater interest in the William Randolph Hearst's *Cuesta Encantada*, The History Center's archives include the George Loorz Papers. Loorz, partner at and later president of the F. C. Stolte Company, worked as the construction superintendent at Hearst Castle and his papers include letters between himself, Julia Morgan, William Randolph Hearst, and others. This collection offers a glimpse into some of the unexpected occurrences Loorz experienced while working at Hearst Castle, from the aggressive ostriches attacking workmen to Mr. Hearst's obsession with the sound of the wind in a portion of his home.<sup>4</sup>

The archives have not been restricted to the distant past, and as our county has grown and modernized so has our institution. The Wiley collection is a series of photographs of buildings around the city of San Luis Obispo in the 1960s through 1987 which catalogs the rapidly modernizing city and allows today's viewer to compare the changes that have occurred in the years since.

Of all the items in the archives it was difficult to choose a "favorite", one that exemplified the history of San Luis Obispo. Perhaps the group of children dressed up in stars and stripes for the Fourth of July Parade in the 1920s? Alphonse Pinart's *ex libris* stamped on the backs of stereographs and books that he abandoned thousands of miles from home? In fact, it is a photograph of the interior of a local saloon called the H & H Bar, located a few blocks from where the museum now stands and named after owners Clarence and Anna Hunsacker. We are honored that the photograph graces the cover of this special issue.

The photograph, likely taken in the first decade of the twentieth century, shows the motley crew of patrons—the dapper gentlemen in their hats and suits rubbing shoulders with the vaqueros from Hearst Ranch wearing studded leather chaps and belts. The H & H Bar was hardly unusual for that era: in 1911 it was one of twenty-three bars in a six block area which contributed to San Luis Obispo's reputation for being a rough western town, even gaining the title "El Barrio del Tigre" or Tiger Town.<sup>5</sup> This photograph epitomizes the rich and varied history that San Luis Obispo has come from. It reminds us that while the days of needing a weathered pail as your second spittoon are long gone, that history is much closer than we might have ever guessed.

Born from the need to preserve a pioneering French vintner's adobe home, The History Center of San Luis Obispo County has grown to match the needs of the community as it modernized. The collection contains paintings, photographs, textiles, letters, and so much more that brings this country's history to life. So the next time you're driving Highway 101 through the Central Coast of California, stop at the History Center because you never know what you could find.



## NOTES

1. Ulz, Eva. "Cen Dallidet: At the Edge of the New World." San Luis Obispo Museum of Art Exhibits on View. 2016. accessed December 27, 2018. <http://www.sloma.org/events/upcoming-events.php?event=1140>.
2. "About Us." The Tribune. accessed December 27, 2018. <https://www.sanluisobispo.com/customer-service/about-us/>.
3. Gregory, Jim. *San Luis Obispo County Outlaws: Desperados, Vigilantes and Bootleggers*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2017.
4. De Wolfe, Evelyn. "San Simeon Builder's er's Forgotten Notes : Cache Enriches Castle Lore." *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 1985. Accessed December 27, 2018. [http://articles.latimes.com/1985-01-27/realestate/re-9933\\_1\\_san-simeon](http://articles.latimes.com/1985-01-27/realestate/re-9933_1_san-simeon).
5. *Outskirts of the Town San Luis Obispo. Barrio Del Tigre (Tiger-town)*. (*Haunts of the Native and Indian Population in the Old Mission Outbuildings*). 1865. Mission Era: California under Spain and Mexico and Reminiscences, ca. 1850-1878, UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library.