
Guide to the California First Theater Collection

Monterey State Historic Park, Monterey, CA

Collection processed and finding aid created by Lori Lindberg, Archivist, San Francisco, CA

Edited First Draft

California State Parks

Pacific House Museum

Monterey State Historic Park

20 Custom House Plaza

Monterey, CA 93940

Note

History--California History--Central Coast HistoryGeographical (By Place)--California--Central CoastArts and Humanities--Theater--General

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Guide to the California First Theatre Collection
Monterey State Historic Park
Monterey, CA

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Note

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Descriptive Summary

Title: California. Department of Parks and Recreation. California First Theatre (Monterey State Historic Park) Collection,

Date Range: 1840-1981.

Collection number: 455.1

Collector: California State Parks
Monterey State Historic Park
Monterey, CA 93940

Extent: 12.49 cubic ft. (19 boxes)

Repository: California State Parks
Monterey State Historic Park
20 Custom House Plaza
Monterey, CA 93940
831-649-7118

Abstract: The California First Theater Collection consists of records, artifacts, and memorabilia connected with the oldest theatrical performance house in California. The bulk of the documentation is related to the theater's last major period of activity, from 1937-1999. In addition, the collection contains significant documentation of contemporary theatrical performance in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City.

Physical location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Monterey District Museum Curator at 831-649-7118.

Language: English.

Legal Status

Public

Access

The collections are open for research by appointment only. Appointments may be made by calling 831-649-7110.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Suggested citation of these records is: [Identification of item], California First Theatre Collection, Monterey State Historic Park, Monterey, CA.

Additional Materials

This collection contains only those materials suitable for treatment as archives. Artifacts, monographs (books), and decorative objects housed in the California First Theatre are not included in this collection. For information on these additional materials, contact the Monterey District Museum Curator at 831-649-7118.

Separated Materials

All books, with the exception of part- and songbooks, in the collection are collected and stored on adjacent shelving with books from other Park archives collections. They are not included in this collection and have been inventoried separately.

History of the California First Theatre

The building in which the first paid public dramatic entertainment in California was staged is located in Old Monterey. John Alfred (Jack) Swan, a sailor of Scottish descent, arrived in Monterey in 1843 as a crew member on the *Soledad*, a Mexican brig engaged in the coast trade between Mexico and Alta California. Upon arriving in Monterey, Swan likes the small city and decides to stay. A lack of immediate employment forces him to sea again, this time as a cook on the Mexican schooner *California*, captained by John B.R. Cooper, another American destined to historical importance in Monterey. After a pair of successful trade voyages between Monterey and the Mexican port of Mazatlan, Swan's culinary skills lose their luster with Captain Cooper and he loses his post. Whether he was fired or jumped ship is unknown, but he arrives in Monterey at the end of 1844, once again with no work. This time, enterprising Swan decides to make a name for himself as a baker and manages to set up a small shop. The American influx to California has begun in earnest by this time and Swan's Yankee patrons soon make Swan's pies a favored concoction. By 1846, with money acquired from the business, he purchases some land on the old Calle Estrada, now the southwest corner of Pacific and Scott Streets. In the summer of the following year he begins construction on an adobe structure, a small house already having been built, with the idea of turning it into a boarding house for itinerant sailors such as he was just a few years prior.

In March 1847 the first of three American transport ships arrives in San Francisco, carrying detachments of the First New York Volunteer Regiment, under the command of Colonel Jonathan Drake Stevenson. By April 1848, Companies D, E, F, G, and I were assigned to Monterey, where the soldiers remained for some months until they were either transferred to other coast cities or mustered out of the service. A number of New Yorkers from Companies D and I, used to the myriad of entertainment choices afforded their leave time in the large cities of the East Coast, devised their own entertainments in Monterey to help relieve the monotony of camp life. The war with Mexico by this time virtually over, a few of the sailors knew their muster was soon to come and, concluding that their entertainments might fetch them money and a possible living after the government's paychecks stopped, approached Swan with the idea of leasing part of his adobe as a theatre. Swan, ever mindful of new and enterprising ways to make money, was favorable to the idea.

Pressed into service quickly, the building was fitted with whatever could be used to make the building suitable for dramatic performance: scraps of lumber, shipping crates, and barrels for the stage and seats, blankets for the curtains. As money came in from admissions, better materials were used, scenery and costumes of higher quality. With no programs or handbills in existence, it is not definitely known what play was the first play performed in Swan's theatre. According to Bancroft, one of the plays given in the Spring of 1848 was Putnam, or, the Lion Son of '76, which was quite profitable. In fact, the theatre was by all accounts a remarkable success, having taken in \$500 in admissions on the first night's performance alone. Melodramas popular at the time were the prevailing works performed in the theatre, complete with a small orchestra adept at accenting every heroine's anguished wail and every villain's mustache twitch.

By 1849, Gold Rush fever was sweeping California, and Monterey was not immune to the loss of population to the gold mines of the Sierras. Performers from Los Angeles came north to attempt to fill the gap, but by the end of 1849, the lure of gold and riches had taken its number of men to the mountains, including Swan, and the company disbanded.

Over the ensuing years, Swan leased his building to a number of business people and it served a variety of functions: whaling station, drug dispensary and store, and eventually a tea room and shop. Swan traveled both in and out of Monterey over the next 35 years, retiring by 1885 to the old adobe, having won and lost a number of fortunes in different ventures. In 1896 Jack Swan died with no heirs, and the old adobe and house began to deteriorate, sitting abandoned until 1906.

1906 brings the crumbling adobe some good fortune when a group of local Monterey citizens, assisted with funds from W.R. Hearst's California Historic Landmarks League, purchase the building and deed it to the State. By 1920 the adobe and house undergo a complete restoration and open to the public as a museum. In 1937, the State leased the buildings to

Denny-Watrous Management, a performing arts organization dedicated to reviving the performance of melodrama in the old First Theatre. A company, Troupers of the Gold Coast, comprised of mostly local residents, revive the performances of late 19th-century melodrama followed by an Olio, an audience sing-along. These performances continued without interruption through a couple of management changes until the buildings closed again for further restoration in 1999.

- 1846 John A. (Jack) Swan acquires land on Calle Estrada, now sw corner of Pacific and Scott Streets in Monterey. House is built. Part of it later becomes a saloon.
- 1847 Long adobe complete by the end of the year and serves as a boarding house for sailors, along with the saloon. Swan a successful businessman.
- 1848-50 Begins conversion of building into a theatre. First play produced in spring. Performances continue with a resident group of locals and mustered sailors through February 1850. Ten plays are produced over the twenty one months.
- 1850-96 Swan rents his adobe and begins a life seeking gold in the Sierra. The house and adobe function over the next 46 years as a lodging house, whaling station (addition of a look out tower occurred in the 1850s), a drug store in the 1870s and finally a tea room and shop.
- 1885 After a Gold Rush boom-and-bust life, Swan retires penniless to his house.
- 1896 Swan dies. The adobe and house sit empty and begin to deteriorate.
- 1906 Building purchased by a group of Monterey citizens and deeded to the State of California.
- 1920 Restoration complete and buildings reopened as a museum.
- 1937 Denny-Watrous Management of Carmel lease the building for theatrical performances. The Troupers of the Gold Coast begin residence.
- 1999 Building closed for renovation.

Scope and Content

The California First Theatre Collection consists of records, artifacts, and memorabilia connected with the oldest theatrical performance house in California, the site of the first minstrelsy production on the West Coast in 1847, and in 1848, the first play. While the collection contains only one real document and some reproductions of the original documents recording the building's existence, such as the land title and promissory notes, and virtually no evidence of its storied first activity period as a theater, 1848-1850, the collection is rich in documentation of the plays and music performed in the theatre during its last major period of activity, the years 1937 to 1999. In addition, the collection contains significant documentation for both activity periods of contemporary theatrical performance in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City. This is revealed in the collection's large holding of American sheet music and song books, with copyright dates spanning a century, as well as scrapbook collections of playbills, theatrical advertisements, and reviews.

Additional materials of note are the autograph manuscript essay by Jack Swan, "My Old Spectacles," the collection of cartes de visite featuring popular San Francisco and international theatrical personalities of the late 19th century, as well as a large number of stereopticon cards. The stereopticon cards include, among many views, images of pre-1906 earthquake San Francisco and prominent mansions and hotels of the city, along with Yosemite Valley images photographed and published by the Carlton E. Watkins studio.

Bibliography

Additional information about the California First Theatre may be found in the following publications:

Bancroft, Hubert Howe, 1832-1918. *History of California*. San Francisco, CA: The History Company, 1884-1890.

MacMinn, George Rupert. *The Theatre of the Golden Era in California*. Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, 1941.

Tays, George. *First Theater in California*. Berkeley, CA: Works Progress Administration, 1936.

Works Progress Administration. *Historical Survey of the Monterey Peninsula, Project #4080*. San Francisco, CA: Works Progress Administration, 1937.

Arrangement of Materials

Materials in this collection are mainly arranged alphabetically by document type and then chronologically if necessary.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in a library's online public access catalog:

Library of Congress Subject Headings

Personal Names:

Booth, Edwin, 1833-1893.

Montez, Lola, 1818-1861.

Swan, John Alfred, 1817-1896.

Subjects:

California--History.
California--Pioneers.
California--Monterey--Historic structures.
Monterey (Calif.)--History.
Theater--California--Monterey.

Box Boxes 1-4

Series I: **Administrative records, 1939-1999****Physical Description:** 45 folders in 4 boxes**Scope and Content Note**

This series contains records of the California First Theatre State Historic Monument and State Parks documentation of visitors, production attendance, weather, and historical collections provenance. In addition, this series contains one of the significant documents in the building's history, the original bill of sale for the land to Jack Swan, signed by both Swan and Marcelino Escobar, Alcalde of Monterey, 1844, and a reproduction of the abstract of title. An interesting anecdote by Swan, "My Old Spectacles," in autograph, is also in this series.

Box 1, Folder 1-16	Warden's weekly report
Box 1, Folder 1	1937
Box 1, Folder 2	1938
Box 1, Folder 3	1939
Box 1, Folder 4	1940
Box 1, Folder 5	1941
Box 1, Folder 6	1942
Box 1, Folder 7	1943
Box 1, Folder 8	1944
Box 1, Folder 9	1945
Box 1, Folder 10	1946
Box 1, Folder 11	1947
Box 1, Folder 12	1948
Box 1, Folder 13	1949
Box 1, Folder 14	1950
Box 1, Folder 15	1951
Box 1, Folder 16	1952
Box 2, Folder 1-14	Supervisor's weekly report
Box 2, Folder 1	1953
Box 2, Folder 2	1954
Box 2, Folder 3	1955
Box 2, Folder 4	1956
Box 2, Folder 5	1957
Box 2, Folder 6	1958
Box 2, Folder 7	1959
Box 2, Folder 8	1960
Box 2, Folder 9	1961
Box 2, Folder 10	1962
Box 2, Folder 11	1963
Box 2, Folder 12	1964
Box 2, Folder 13	1965
Box 2, Folder 14	1966
Box 3, Folder 1-8	Supervisor's weekly report
Box 3, Folder 1	1974
Box 3, Folder 2	1975
Box 3, Folder 3	1976
Box 3, Folder 4	1977

Box 3, Folder 5	1978
Box 3, Folder 6	1979
Box 3, Folder 7	1980
Box 3, Folder 8	1981
Box 4, Folder 1	Abstract of Title (reproduction).
Box 4, Folder 2	Original bill of sale for land to Jack Swan, 1844.
Box 4, Folder 3	Manuscript essay by Swan, "My Old Spectacles," 1874.
Box 4, Folder 4	Gift agreements and loan documentation.
Box 4, Folder 5	List of First Theatre productions under Denny-Watrous Management, 1937-1959.
Box 4, Folder 6	List of First Theatre productions, 1937-1962, prepared by Vera Stewart.
Box 4, Folder 7	Merienda schedule, 1949.
Box 4, Folder 8	Supervisory Practices Course SP-1 study guide, Dept. of Parks and Recreation, January, 1966. Robert Reese, trainee.
Box 4, Folder 9	Visitor Register, 2/27/1927-8/11/1928.
Box Box 5	Series II: Correspondence, 1848-1958

Physical Description: 2 folders in 1/2 box

Scope and Content Note

Scope and Content:

This small series highlights correspondence related to the California First Theatre, in particular that related to gifts received as part of the historical collections.

Box 5, Folder 1	Correspondence - Isabel Hartigan with Lucille Lane, 1948.
Box 5, Folder 2	Gift Correspondence, 1958.
Box Box 5	Series III: Ephemera, 1880-1972

Physical Description: 14 folders in 1/2 box

Scope and Content Note

Scope and Content:

This series contains ephemeral items such as performance programs and tickets from the California First Theatre, and other interesting theatrical and festival memorabilia from San Francisco, Monterey, and Chicago.

Subseries i: **First Theatre ephemera, 1944-1972**

Physical Description: (5 folders)

Scope and Content Note

This subseries contains only California First Theatre-related ephemera.

Box 5, Folder 3	Hand-written song lyrics for two songs, n.d.: <i>All for a Woman's Love, The Black Sheep Loves You Best of All.</i>
Box 5, Folder 4-6	Performance programs
Box 5, Folder 4	1944, 1959
Box 5, Folder 5	1960-1962
Box 5, Folder 6	1963-1972
Box 5, Folder 7	Performance ticket from "<i>The Unkissed Bride</i>"

Subseries ii: **Non-First Theatre ephemera, 1880-1962**

Physical Description: (9 folders)

Scope and Content Note

This series contains a number of interesting ephemeral items from other performance houses and entertainment venues

Box 5, Folder 8	1939 Golden Gate International Exposition brochure and admission ticket.
Box 5, Folder 9	Kirby's Opera House (Chicago, IL) performance program, 1880s
Box 5, Folder 10	Lake County promotional brochure, n.d.
Box 5, Folder 11	Leavitt's Bush St. Theatre (San Francisco, CA) performance program, 1885

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- Box 5, Folder 12 **Monterey, CA event and informational brochures: Hotel Del Monte, n.d.; Merienda celebration, 1945; Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West Admission Day Celebration program, 1954; State Historical Monuments at Monterey brochure, n.d.**
- Box 5, Folder 13 **Orpheum Theatre (San Francisco, CA) 10th anniversary souvenir booklet, 1897.**
- Box 5, Folder 14 **Picture post cards, various Monterey area views: Hotel Del Monte, Monterey cypress trees, California First Theatre, etc. n.d.**
- Box 5, Folder 15 **Tivoli Opera House (San Francisco, CA) performance program, 1899**
- Box 5, Folder 16 **Zepeda's Mexican restaurant (Monterey, CA) menu, 1962**
- Box Boxes 6-11 **Series IV: Olio Performance Sheet Music, 1840s-1940**
- Physical Description:** 47 folders in 6 boxes
- Scope and Content Note**
- This series contains approximately 150 pieces per box of an extensive collection of American sheet music. Date range spans 1840-1940.
- Not arranged in any particular order.
- Box 6 **Box 1 of 61840s-1940**
- Physical Description:** 7 folders
- Box 7 **Box 2 of 61840s-1940**
- Physical Description:** 6 folders
- Box 8 **Box 3 of 61840s-1940**
- Physical Description:** 9 folders
- Box 9 **Box 4 of 61840s-1940**
- Physical Description:** 8 folders
- Box 10 **Box 5 of 61840s-1940**
- Physical Description:** 8 folders
- Box 11 **Box 6 of 61840s-1940**
- Physical Description:** 9 folders
- Box Box 12 **Series V: Oversize Materials, 1903-**
- Physical Description:** 5 folders in 1 box
- Scope and Content Note**
- This series contains materials larger than the standard letter format that need to be stored flat. Includes a nice watercolor of the California First Theatre, maker unidentified.
- Box 12, Folder 1 **Periodical: *California Ladies Magazine*, December, 1903.**
- Box 12, Folder 2 **Photograph, mounted: Interior of California First Theatre, WPA photo series taken by Sibyl Anikeeff.**
- Box 12, Folder 3 **Photoreproduction: Newspaper article re: Lola Montez residence in Grass Valley, CA. n.d.**
- Box 12, Folder 4 **Promotional brochure: Monterey Chamber of Commerce re: Monterey Peninsula recreation and living. n.d.**
- Box 12, Folder 5 **Watercolor on paper, unframed: California First Theatre. Unidentified maker. n.d.**
- Box Boxes 13-15 **Series VI: Photographs, 1852-1890**
- Physical Description:** 7 folders and 172 items in 3 boxes
- Scope and Content Note**
- This series contains all photographs and photographic material in the collection. Contains a large number of stereopticon cards of various Monterey, other California and European views.
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- Box 13 Subseries i: **First Theatre related photographs, n.d.**
Physical Description: (2 folders)
Scope and Content Note
In this subseries are a pair of audience photographs and two photos used as props in productions.
- Box 13, Folder 1 **Photographs**
Physical Description: (4 items)
- Box 13, Folder 2 **Photoreproduction, "Lola coming!" political cartoon**
Physical Description: (1 item)
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- Box 13-15 Subseries ii: **Non-First Theatre related photographs, 1852-1890**
Physical Description: (3 folders in Box 13 and 2 additional boxes)
Scope and Content Note
None of these photographs are directly related to the First Theatre, but many do portray the surrounding environment of the Monterey Peninsula.
- Box 13, Folder 3 **2 mounted albumen prints: Unidentified man, n.d.; View of San Francisco waterfront, 1852.**
- Box 13, Folder 4 **13 card-mounted albumen prints, various subjects, incl. Pacific Grove, Del Monte, Monterey, Mission San Miguel.**
- Box 13, Folder 5 **Souvenir photogravure album: cast of *Trilby*, London stage production, 1895.**
- Box 14, Group 1 **Cartes de visite and cabinet card photographs**
Scope and Content Note
43 cartes de visite and cabinet card photographs, various subjects, including late 19th century theatrical personalities in San Francisco, along with various San Francisco views such as interior views of the Palace Hotel, Mark Hopkins mansion, Stanford mansion, and other California and non-California locales.
- Box 14, Group 2 **Stereopticon cards**
Scope and Content Note
55 stereopticon cards, various views, including Yosemite Valley and other California locations, European and Asian landmarks.
- Box 15, Group 3 **More stereopticon cards**
Scope and Content Note
74 stereopticon cards, various views, including Yosemite Valley and other California locations and non-California locations, European and Asian landmarks.
- Box Box 16 Series VII: **Publicity, 1874-1965**
Physical Description: 12 folders in 1 box
Scope and Content Note
This series contains periodicals, some containing articles related to the California First Theatre, others with articles relating to Monterey in general.
Arranged alphabetically by title of publication and then chronologically if more than one issue.
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Box Box 16, section 1	Subseries i: First Theatre-related publications, 1937-1962 Physical Description: (2 folders) Scope and Content Note This subseries contains multiple copies of an article about the reopening of the California First Theatre and a selection of newsclippings.
Box 16, Folder 1	Californian, The. V:29. August 11, 1937 Physical Description: Six copies.
Box 16, Folder 2	Assorted newsclippings, 1937-1962. Physical Description: 10 items.

Box Box 16, section 2	Subseries ii: Non-First Theatre-related publications, 1874-1965 Physical Description: (9 folders) Scope and Content Note Publications in this subseries do not contain any articles that mention the California First Theatre and were likely used as props.
Box 16, Folder 3	American West, The. I:1, Winter 1965.
Box 16, Folder 4	Buick Magazine. II:6, September 1936.
Box 16, Folder 5	Californian, The. V:10, March 31, 1937.
Box 16, Folder 6	Days Doings, The. XIII:333, October 10, 1874.
Box 16, Folder 7	Film Year, The. 1949.
Box 16, Folder 8	MotorLand. XXXII:4. April 1933; XXXV:2. August 1934.
Box 16, Folder 9	"The Mid-Spring Stage - A Season Still Active." New York Times, The. Sunday, May 13, 1928.
Box 16, Folder 10	Noticias del Puerto de Monterey . XIII:4. December 1969. Monterey: Monterey History and Art Association.
Box 16, Folder 11	Saludos amigos! City of Monterey: Office of the Mayor. n.d.
Box 16, Folder 12	Rambler, The. I:8, March 1936.
Box Boxes 17-18	Theatre World. Vols. II-V. 1945-46 - 1949-50.
	Women's City Club Magazine . I:9 October 1927. San Francisco: Women's City Club.
	Series VIII: Scrapbooks, 1870-1960 Physical Description: 10 items in 2 boxes Scope and Content Note This series contains scrapbooks of accumulated news clippings and theatrical advertisements from New York City, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, along with a scrapbook of California First Theatre playbills from 1938-1960.
Box 17, scrapbook 1	455-63-6 FT Scrapbook of various New York theatrical advertisements and announcements, 1889 - 1899, including the Metropolitan Opera House and other prominent 19th century performance houses.
Box 17, scrapbook 2	455-97-6 FT Scrapbook of California First Theatre playbills from 1938-1960, incl. handwritten list of productions on rear pages through 1963 and typewritten list through 1965.
Box 18	Empty scrapbook covers Physical Description: 3 items
Box 18, scrapbook 4	Scrapbook remnants of few pages and no covers chronicling the history of the California First Theatre, productions and restoration (no dates). Physical Description: (2 items)

Box 18, book 5	455-63-2 FT Scrapbook of song lyrics, newsclippings, advertisements and envelope of playbills from San Francisco performance houses, 1894 - 1898.
Box 18, book 6	455-63-3 FT Broadside advertising sale of livestock, 1870.
Box 18, book 7	455-58-5 FT Scrapbook of theatre advertisements and playbills, Virginia City and Boston areas, 1878 - 1883.
Box 18, book 8	455-62-1 FT Scrapbook of theatre advertisements and playbills, Chicago and surrounding metropolitan area, 1913.
Box Box 19	<p>Series IX: Scripts, Scores, Musical Instruction and Part Books, 1855-1943</p> <p>Physical Description: 11 folders in 1 box</p> <p>Scope and Content Note</p> <p>This series contains an assortment of play scripts, musical scores, and music instruction books with dates ranging from 1855 to 1943. Approximately half of the items date before 1900. It is possible that some of the musical selections in these books were used for the Olio performances after the plays presented at the Theatre.</p> <p>In 11 folders arranged chronologically.</p>
Box 19, Folder 1	Rachel, Mlle. <u>Adrienne Lecouvreur</u>. New York: Darcie and Corbyn, 1855.
Box 19, Folder 2	<u>Newburgh Musical Bulletin</u> . II:1, January 1872.
Box 19, Folder 3	<u>Peters Musical Monthly</u>. XIV:85, September 1874.
Box 19, Folder 4	<u>Sherman and Hyde's Musical Review</u> . IV:1, January 1876; IV:7, July 1877; IV:9, September 1877.
Box 19, Folder 5	455-58-15 to 455-58-19 5 play scripts, plus 1 Samuel French catalog, 1880-81.
Box 19, Folder 6	Bower, Harry A. <u>Imperial Method for the Drum</u>. Cincinnati: John Church Co., 1898.
Box 19, Folder 7	Loeschhorn, A. <u>Loeschhorn's Progressive Piano Studies</u>. New York: T.B. Harms and Co., n.d.
Box 19, Folder 8	Dodge, May Hewes and John Wilson. <u>In the Garden of the Shah</u>. New York (?): Willis Music Company, 1920.
Box 19, Folder 9	U.S. School of Music. <u>Home Study Lessons for Piano</u>. New York: U.S. School of Music, 1925.
Box 19, Folder 10	Part book: Song, "Taking a Chance on Love" by Duke, Fetter, and Latouche. New York: Leo Feist, 1940.
Box 19, Folder 11	<u>Big Song Magazine</u>. III:4, May 1943.