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Guide to the John C. Gordon Photographic Collection

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Guide to the John C. Gordon Photographic Collection

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Processed by:
Danelle Moon
Date Completed:
2009
Encoded by:
Mary Ellen Petrich

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Descriptive Summary

Title: John C. Gordon Photographic Collection

Dates: 1910-1963

Collection number: MSS-1996-03-29

Creator: Gordon, John C., 1887-1967

Collection Size: 14 boxes and 3 drawers (processed collection).114.89 linear feet (complete collection).

Repository: San José State University. Library.

San José, California 95192-0028

Abstract: The John C. Gordon Photographic Collection documents the history of San José and the Santa Clara Valley from 1910 to 1963. The collection consists of 6,000 photographic prints and 187 panorama prints. The photographic prints are organized by subject, covering a variety of topics that illustrate everyday life in the region. This collection documents the changes in area business ventures that include agriculture, fruit canning and processing, banking, local businesses, aeronautics, railroads, and other manufacturing businesses. The collection also includes 525 panorama nitrate and safety film negatives, 10,000 glass and film negatives, and the photographer's portfolios and negative index. These items are not described in this collection inventory, but will be added at a future date. This collection is arranged into two series: Series I. Photographic Prints; and Series II. Panorama Prints.

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

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

The photographic prints described in this document are open for research. The collection also includes photographic negatives which are restricted.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

John C. Gordon Photographic Collection, MSS-1996-03-29, San José State University Library Special Collections & Archives.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Danelle Moon. Finding aid EAD encoded by Mary Ellen Petrich. Reviewed by Danelle Moon and Erin Louthen.

Project Information

This finding aid was created as part of the Survey and Cataloging Project, a two-year San José State University Library grant project funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The project began in 2008. The Project Director is Danelle Moon. The Project Archivist is Erin Louthen.

Biographical History

John C. Gordon was born in Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin on January 3, 1887, the first son of Reverend G. W. Gordon. Reverend Gordon earned his living as a photographer and as a Methodist preacher. John Gordon attended Albion College in Michigan, and later took a teaching position in Nebraska. On June 8, 1910, he married Mina Eleanor Schnackenberg and following their wedding reception, the couple moved to Campbell, California. Their first residence was in a prune orchard located on Budd Avenue, and within a few years they relocated to Mayellen Avenue near West San Carlos Street. Gordon earned his early living working at the local hardware store, while raising his young family.

In 1916 Gordon opened a commercial photography studio located at 97 South First Street in downtown San José, just above what was then known as Lean's Jewelry Store. He later moved to 395 South Street where he remained until his retirement in 1963. As a local commercial photographer, Gordon served the business community by creating glass slides for advertisements used to promote local theaters, sporting events, civic events, and weddings. In addition, Gordon photographed accidents and criminal trials for the *San José Mercury News*.

An active community member and businessman, Gordon belonged to the Chamber of Commerce, the San José Water Board, and was Master of the Campbell Grange. He also held membership in the Knights of the Round Table, served on the school board, the YMCA, and the First Methodist Church. Gordon was a noted singer, song leader, and musician, and loaned many of his musical instruments (piano, guitar, marimba, saxophone, and trombone) for use in Santa Clara Valley's annual Fiesta de las Rosas Parade, as well as the school band.

John C. Gordon died at the age of 80 in 1967, and was buried in Los Gatos Cemetery next to his wife, who died in 1950. His children, Ronald H. Gordon, Doris Herschbach, and Wilbur C. Gordon sold their father's photographic collection to San José State University in 1996.

Scope and Content of Collection

The John C. Gordon Photographic collection documents the history of San José and the Santa Clara Valley from 1910 to 1963. The photographic prints are organized by subject, covering a variety of topics that provide a 50-year visual history of the region. Arranged by subject categories assigned by the photographer, the collection documents everyday life, historical context of place and time, and illustrates changes in area business ventures that include agriculture, fruit canning and processing, banking, local businesses, aeronautics, rail roads, and other manufacturing businesses. In addition, the collection includes images of the Winchester Mystery House, the Lick Observatory, storefronts, hospitals, hotels, landscapes, funerals, weddings, parks, parades, and many mixed group shots of families and local organizations.

Separated Material

The collection also includes 525 panorama nitrate and safety film negatives, 10,000 glass and film negatives, and the photographer's portfolios and negative index. These items are not described in this collection inventory, but will be added at a future date.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged into two series: Series I. Photographic Prints; and Series II. Panorama Prints.

Indexing Terms

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

Gordon, John C., 1887-1967.

California -- History -- Photographs.

California -- Social life and customs -- Photographs.

Santa Clara Valley (Santa Clara County, Calif.) -- History -- Photographs.

Series I: **Photographic Prints 1910-1963**

Physical Description: 11 boxes

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series provides a rich visual representation of everyday life in San José and Santa Clara County, California. The range of subjects covered illustrate change over time in a variety of industries, including agriculture and manufacturing, as well as small and medium local businesses such as Hart's Department Store and the Hippodrome Theater. Other images include the Winchester Mystery House, the Lick Observatory, the San José Light Tower, San José State University, parks and parades, funerals, weddings, and mixed groups and local organizations. While the bulk of the collection documents industry, there are some fine representations of landscapes and historic sites including churches and missions, museums, and views of the Monterey Bay, the town of New Almaden, and Yosemite National Park. In addition, Gordon was very active in the Grange as well as the Knights of the Round Table Youth, and a small portion of the collection is devoted to the Grange movement in California.

While all of the photographs have historical value, the images documenting agriculture and the canneries provide the foundation for understanding the transformation of the San José and Santa Clara County region from the "Valley of Hearts Delight" to Silicon Valley. Fruit production brought prosperity and opportunity to the county, which brought diverse ethnic groups to the area. This same prosperity and immigration to the region would be replicated with the formation of high-tech industries in the 1960s forward. Researchers interested in tracing the diversity of life in this region will thus find examples of urban life, education, politics, religion, ethnicity and race, transportation, industry, art, and culture.

Arrangement

This series is arranged alphabetically by subject categories assigned by the photographer.

Box 1 **Aerial Views**

Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **Agriculture**

Physical Description: 8 folders

Box 1 **Albert L. Solon Tile Patterns**

Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **Alma Village**

Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **Alviso**

Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **American Legion Activities**

Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **American Peat Moss Collection**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **Animals**
Physical Description: 12 folders

Box 1 **Artwork**
Physical Description: 2 folders

Box 1 **Asilomar Church Retreat**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **Banks**
Physical Description: 11 folders

Box 1 **Body Parts**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **Books**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 1 **Buildings**
Physical Description: 4 folders

Box 2 **Burlesque Theater**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 2 **Business Interiors**
Physical Description: 10 folders

Box 2 **Cabinets**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 2 **Cafeteria/Ice Cream Equipment**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 2 **Canneries**
Physical Description: 4 folders

Box 2	**Cemeteries/Mortuaries** **Physical Description:** 2 folders
Box 2	**Ceramic Kilns** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 2	**Churches** **Physical Description:** 21 folders
Box 2	**Clubs** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 2	**Construction** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 2	**County Fair** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 2	**Disasters** **Physical Description:** 2 folders
Box 2	**Documents** **Physical Description:** 7 folders
Box 3	**Entertainment** **Physical Description:** 5 folders
Box 3	**Factories** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 3	**Fair Displays** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 3	**Flowers** **Physical Description:** 6 folders

Box 3	**Fruit** **Physical Description:** 10 folders
Box 3	**Fruit Processing** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 3	**Funerals** **Physical Description:** 8 folders
Box 4	**Funerals (continued)** **Physical Description:** 3 folders
Box 4	**Furniture** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 4	**Grange** **Physical Description:** 3 folders
Box 4	**Government** **Physical Description:** 8 folders
Box 4	**Hart's Department Store** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 4	**Hinds Murder Case** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 4	**Horse Races** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 4	**Hospitals** **Physical Description:** 5 folders
Box 5	**Houses** **Physical Description:** 11 folders
Box 5	**Insects** **Physical Description:** 1 folder

Box 5	**Interiors** **Physical Description:** 13 folders
Box 5	**Knights of the Round Table Youth** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 5	**Landscapes** **Physical Description:** 3 folders
Box 6	**Landscapes (continued)** **Physical Description:** 3 folders
Box 6	**Lick Observatory** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 6	**Light Tower** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 6	**Machinery** **Physical Description:** 5 folders
Box 7	**Machinery (continued)** **Physical Description:** 4 folders
Box 7	**Medico Dental** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 7	**Miscellaneous** **Physical Description:** 3 folders
Box 7	**Monterey Bay** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 7	**Museums** **Physical Description:** 1 folder

Box 7 **New Almaden**
Physical Description: 2 folders

Box 7 **Normandin Auto**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 7 **Parades**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 7 **Parks**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 8 **People Exterior**
Physical Description: 40 folders

Box 9 **People Exterior (continued)**
Physical Description: 27 folders

Box 9 **People Interior**
Physical Description: 13 folders

Box 10 **People Interior (continued)**
Physical Description: 21 folders

Box 11 **People Interior (continued)**
Physical Description: 16 folders

Box 11 **Plaza San José**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 11 **Poultry Farming**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 11 **Products**
Physical Description: 5 folders

Box 11 **San José Lumber Co.**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 11	**San José State University** **Physical Description:** 8 folders
Box 11	**San José State University - People** **Physical Description:** 8 folders
Box 11	**Schools** **Physical Description:** 14 folders
Box 12	**Schools (continued)** **Physical Description:** 15 folders
Box 12	**School Portraits** **Physical Description:** 7 folders
Box 12	**Scottish Rite** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 12	**Sports** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 12	**Smith Manufacturing Company** **Physical Description:** 1 folder
Box 12	**Storefronts** **Physical Description:** 83 folders
Box 13	**Storefronts (continued)** **Physical Description:** 33 folders
Box 13	**Streets** **Physical Description:** 2 folders
Box 13	**Stretchers** **Physical Description:** 1 folder

Box 13 **Structures**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 13 **Theaters**
Physical Description: 11 folders

Box 13 **Transportation**
Physical Description: 36 folders

Box 13 **Valley Scenes**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 13 **Vegetables**
Physical Description: 10 folders

Box 14 **Weddings**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 14 **Winchester Mystery House**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 14 **Window Displays**
Physical Description: 6 folders

Box 14 **Wineries**
Physical Description: 2 folders

Box 14 **Wood**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Box 14 **Yosemite**
Physical Description: 1 folder

Series II: **Panorama Prints 1910-1963**

Physical Description: 3 drawers

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series consists of 187 panorama prints, which document the history of Santa Clara County from the 1920s through the 1950s. The images include landscape views of the Santa Cruz Mountains, Lake Tahoe, Big Basin Redwoods State Park, Alum Rock, agriculture, local business storefronts, churches, the Santa Clara Mission and the Carmel Mission, schools, and a variety of social gatherings of men, women, and children. Also included are a few images of the town of Cupertino and the Linda Vista Golf Course.

Arrangement

This series is arranged alphabetically by subject.

Drawer 1 **Agriculture**

Physical Description: 72 prints

Drawer 2 **Storefronts, Churches, Schools, Landscapes**

Physical Description: 61 prints

Drawer 3 **People, Transportation**

Physical Description: 54 prints