

2011

## Ted Sahl Social Justice Collection

San Jose State University, Special Collections and Archives

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## Guide to the Ted Sahl Social Justice Collection

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Collection number: MSS-2010-10-25



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Finding aid funded by the generous support of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

**NHPRC**

DOCUMENTING DEMOCRACY

*National Historical Publications and Records Commission*

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Ted Sahl Social Justice Collection

**Dates:** 1970-2010

**Collection number:** MSS-2010-10-25

**Creator:** Sahl, Theodore

**Collection Size:** 56 boxes, 57.29 linear feet

**Repository:** San José State University. Library.

San José, California 95192-0028

**Abstract:** The Ted Sahl Social Justice Collection represents the work of local photojournalist Theodore Sahl (Ted). A long term resident of San José, Sahl, documented social, political, and cultural events in the Bay Area through photography. His early work largely focused on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in San José, but he also documented a range of social protest movements and political events from the 1970s to the present. This collection represents the culmination of his work over the last thirty years, and is a companion to the Ted Sahl Collection, which documents the LGTB community from 1976-2001, and the Black Americana Collection.

**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 collection is open for research.

### Publication Rights

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### Preferred Citation

Ted Sahl Social Justice Collection, MSS-2010-10-25, San José State University Library Special Collections & Archives.

### Processing Information

Collection processed by Jeannette Eaton. Finding aid EAD encoded by Mary Alexander. Reviewed by Danelle Moon.

### Biographical History

Theodore Sahl (1927- ) is an award winning photographer in San José, California. Sahl spent the last 30 years as a photojournalist, documenting social and political events in the Bay Area. Born May 5, 1927 to a poor Jewish family in Roxbury, an Irish suburb near Boston, he faced discrimination on a daily basis living in the tenements of South Boston. He served in the U.S. Navy (1947) and was stationed in Charleston, South Carolina where he first witnessed separate facilities and drinking fountains for African Americans. These early experiences formed his views on social justice and civil rights. He spent his primary career working as a welder in California, and in the 1970s he became an active photojournalist in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community.

Although best known for his involvement with the LGBT community in San José, he also covered the anti-nuclear demonstrations at the Lawrence Livermore Radiation Laboratory (1980-1987), the Mt. Diablo Nuclear Plant protests (1980-1987), the United Farm Workers strikes (1970-1980s), as well as many other social protest movements in the region.

Sahl's long time association with the LGBT community began in 1978 after a bitter dispute took place between the gay community and members of the Christian right. Local Christian groups were upset over the San José City Council's decision to issue a proclamation in support of Gay Pride Week. While the Christian groups mobilized against the City Council, the gay community held a rally in support of Gay Pride Week. Intrigued by the grassroots activism and interested in recording the event, Sahl attended the protest and thereby launched a long career documenting the LGBT community.

Initially, the community distrusted Sahl's motives as a heterosexual outsider. At that time, many individuals in the gay community were still "closeted" and did not wish to be photographed. Over the next three decades, however, Sahl gained the trust of the community and today is widely recognized for his work as a photojournalist and as an outspoken advocate for gay rights.

Sahl served as the staff photographer for a number of local LGBT newspapers including the *Lambda News* (1978-1983), *Our Paper* (1984-1988), *South Bay Times* (1988-1990), and the *Valley Views*. His photographs have appeared in a number of works, including a 1999 *San José Mercury News* documentary on the city's lesbian and gay community, entitled *A Community of One*. More recently his work was recognized in another *Mercury News* story published March 25, 2011, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Billy DeFrank center. In 1981, the San Francisco Cable Car Award Association nominated Sahl for an award in photojournalism. He was also the recipient of an honorable mention in *Advocate* magazine's National Photo Contest in the "People" category. He has the distinction of being the only heterosexual to ever become the President of the Board of the San José Gay Pride Celebration Committee and was inducted into the Santa Clara Gay Hall of Fame in 1988. He is the author of *From Closet to Community: a Quest for Gay and Lesbian Liberation in San Jose and Santa Clara County* (2002).

### Scope and Content of Collection

The Ted Sahl Social Justice Collection represents the work of local photojournalist Theodore Sahl (Ted). A long term resident of San José, Sahl, documented social, political, and cultural events in the Bay Area through photography. His early work largely focused on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in San José, but he also documented a range of social protest movements and political events from the 1970s to the present. This collection represents the culmination of his work over the last thirty years, and is a companion to the Ted Sahl Collection, which documents the LGBT community from 1976-2010, and the Black Americana Collection.

This photographic collection similarly depicts the LGBT community in San José, as well as documenting the anti-nuclear protests against Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in the 1980s. Other protest movements, farm labor strikes, and rallies, are well represented. Sahl captured numerous action shots of, activists, campaign initiatives, celebrities, the environment, festivals, local events, politicians, and numerous social justice protests. Series V documents his life as an artist, photographer, researcher, and writer, and includes the first draft of his book *From Closet to Community*, which he self-published in 2002.

The bulk of this collection consists of photographic essays he compiled, contact prints, negatives, printed materials, ephemera, personal memoirs, and a very small collection of non-photographic artwork.

### Arrangement

This collection is arranged into five series: Peace Protests & Demonstrations, 1980-2007; Culture, Society, & Politics, 1970-2009; LGBT Identity Politics, 1970-2010; Recreation, Leisure & the Environment, 1970-1989; Ted Sahl - Personal Memoirs, 1976-2010.

### Indexing Terms

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

Gays -- Political Activity -- California -- San Jose

Gay Liberation Movement -- California -- Santa Clara County

Activists -- Political

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Antinuclear movement -- California -- Livermore  
Gays -- California -- San Jose -- History  
Photojournalists  
Gay rights -- United States  
Civil rights -- Gay rights  
Queer studies  
GLBT studies  
LGBT studies  
AIDS activists  
Social justice  
Peace movements -- San Francisco Bay Area -- California  
California -- Politics and government  
Anti-war Demonstrations  
U.S. Military -- Naval bases  
Ku Klux Klan (1915- )  
San Jose State University  
Sheen, Martin

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**Series I : Peaceful Protests: Anti-Nuclear 1980-2007**

**Physical Description:** 6 boxes

**Series Scope and Content Summary**

This series primarily documents Ted Sahl's photographic essays of the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory anti-nuclear demonstrations that took place in the 1980s, as well as other blockades, demonstrations, and arrests associated with anti-war protest at United States Naval Bases, and nuclear power plants. These photographs provide a visual representation of the peace and anti-nuclear war movements in the Bay Area in the 1980s. Collectively each photographic essay provides a snap-shot view of civil rights activism and the struggle for freedom of speech in the late 20th century.

A notable example is the "Family Day Demonstration" where protestors dressed up as skeletons to illustrate the fatally detrimental effects of poisonous radiation. Additionally, there are photographic images of anti-nuke and anti-war demonstration prayer vigils to honor the Japanese victims of the Hiroshima atomic bombing by the United States military at the end of World War II (See box 4 oversized photographs).

Scholars interested in the history of anti-war and anti-nuclear campaigns will find visual representations of peace activists and organizers of the Livermore Action Group and other organizations connected to the San José Peace and Justice Center. This series includes print copies of the *San José Peace Times* newsletter published by South Bay Mobilization Activists. A unique find within this series is "Songs to Rock the Nation!" written by protestors from the Vandenberg Air Force Base U.S. strike weapons in 1983. These protests brought ordinary people together with high profile celebrities such as Martin Sheen and Joan Baez. Sheen participated in the Vandenberg protest and was eventually arrested. He is well known as a social justice activist. (See box 3)

**Arrangement**

This series is arranged by format and chronologically by date. Note that the original essays have been removed from the plastic binders and re-housed in archival boxes and folders. Ted Sahl's original photographic essay, number, title, and number of photos are generally included in front of each folder, and may include negatives.

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Boxes 1-3

**Photographic Essays 1980-2007**

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Boxes 4-5

**Oversized Photographs circa 1980s**

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Box 6

**News clippings (original and photocopies), news releases, articles, pamphlets, legislation and campaign initiatives, and published works on direction action 1981-2002**

**Series II : Culture, Society and Politics 1970-2009**

**Physical Description:** 9 boxes

**Series Scope and Content Summary**

This series provides a visual representation of culture, society, and politics in the South Bay and beyond, and includes a significant body of images of Native Americans, Hispanic laborers, and African-American communities. Some of the primary examples include images of Native American burial grounds, the Watsonville Cannery and Farm workers Strikes, the Freedom Train in San José, the Klu Klux Klan protest in St. James Park, and images of anonymous homeless people. In addition, local festivals, social gatherings, university events, organizational rallies, and political protests are well represented.

There are also several images of local and national politicians and celebrities. Some examples include Joan Baez, Tom Bradley, Jerry Brown, Cesar Chavez, Don Edwards, Jerry Falwell, Geraldine Ferraro, Jane Fonda, Jesse Jackson, Harvey Milk, Norman Mineta, O.J. and Nicole Simpson, Martin Sheen, and Bishop Tutu.

**Arrangement**

This series is arranged by format and chronologically by date. Note that the original essays have been removed from the plastic binders and re-housed in archival boxes and folders. Ted Sahl's original photographic essay, number, title, and number of photos are generally included in front of each folder, and may include negatives.

Boxes 7-9

**Photographic Essays 1980-2007**

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Boxes 10-15

**Oversized Photographs 1970s-1980s**

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Box 16

**News clippings (original and photocopies), articles, pamphlets, published works, and other correspondence 1986-2008**

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**Series III : LGBT Identity Politics 1970-2010****Physical Description:** 26 boxes**Series Scope and Content Summary**

This series documents the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community in the South Bay and the larger San Francisco Bay Area. The photographic content is quite diverse and it provides a long-term view of the South Bay LGBT community, from the early bar scenes, drag queen culture, to the political activism surrounding gay rights and gay marriage. Some of the most compelling images document AIDS epidemic victims, and include head shots of the faces of men and women who died from the disease.

The printed materials provide documentation on the Imperial Royal Lion Monarchy (ILRM) of San José Inc., a non-profit organization committed to fostering equal rights, promoting a positive image of the LGBT community, and providing charitable support to gay and straight organizations in Santa Clara County. Founded in 1990, the IRLM has distributed over \$100,000 to local organizations. They raise money through gay balls and drag queen coronations, stage shows, and other events. The balls prominently featured the spirit of the "Drag Queen" culture and they worked closely with the Billy DeFrank LGBT Community Center. This segment illustrates the connections between LGBT organizations and the importance of networking in the community.

Other images document some of the LGBT political icons in Northern California. There are a number of photographs of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay candidate to be elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and of Robert Reformer, author, musician, and LGBT activist.

The printed matter includes brochures, flyers, programs, news clippings, newspapers, pamphlets, and miscellany. Other unpublished essays and ephemera complement the numerous periodicals including *On Out Now*, *A&U American AIDs*, and newspapers and newsletters made popular among many LGBT organizations. The newsletters, magazines, and photographs represented here reflect the local grass roots activism and lifestyles, from the counterculture revolution of the 1970s to the impact of the AIDS epidemic in the South Bay. The Voices of C.A.R.E., People Living with HIV and AIDS, and the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDs Resources Emergency Act are also documented here.

**Arrangement**

This series is arranged by format and chronologically by date. Note that the original essays have been removed from the plastic binders and re-housed in archival boxes and folders. Ted Sahl's original photographic essay, number, title, and number of photos are generally included in front of each folder, and may include negatives.

Please note that some of the photographic content in this series may contain partial nudity and/or graphic material.

Boxes 24-29

**Photo Boxes and Albums 1970s-2010**

Boxes 30-31

**Oversized Photographs 1970s-1980s**

Box 32

**Administrative Records 1986-2008**

Boxes 33-37

**News clippings, newsletters, flyers, programs, brochures, pamphlets, and miscellany 1999-2009**

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**Series IV : Recreation, Leisure and the Environment 1970-1989****Physical Description:** 3 boxes**Series Scope and Content Summary**

This small series represents Ted Sahl's personal interests and his travel experiences while on vacation. This series is less political in nature and is focused almost entirely on recreation, leisure, and the environment. Sahl captured a variety of sports, including martial arts, flag football, flying, sailing, skate boarding, swimming, and wrestling. This series includes photographic essays, as well as oversized landscape photographs of California, New Mexico, Oregon, Point Lobos, Sante Fe, Tao Pueblo, Tacoma, and Yosemite. Additionally, it contains a number of images of historical figures and "Wild West" reenactments at the San José History Museum in Kelly Park, the Santa Cruz Cooper House, views of jazz musicians from the Los Gatos night clubs, wine festivals, and images taken after the 1989 Loma Prieta Earth Quake.

**Arrangement**

This series is arranged by format and chronologically by date. Note that the original essays have been removed from the plastic binders and re-housed in archival boxes and folders. Ted Sahl's original photographic essay, number, title, and number of photos are generally included in front of each folder, and may include negatives.

Please note that some of the photographic content in this series may contain partial nudity and/or graphic material.

Boxes 44-45

**Photographic Essays 1970s-1989**

Box 46

**Oversized Photographs undated**

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**Series V : Ted Sahl -- The Man, 1976-2010 1976-2010****Physical Description:** 9 boxes**Series Scope and Content Summary**

This series documents the personal life of Ted Sahl--artist, photographer, researcher, and writer. The materials in this series include his personal writings, which include poetry and a draft copy of his book *From Closet to Community*, memorabilia, business logs, miscellaneous photographic essays, and art work, including self portraits.

**Arrangement**

This series is arranged by format and chronologically by date. Note that the original essays have been removed from the plastic binders and re-housed in archival boxes and folders. Ted Sahl's original photographic essay, number, title, and number of photos are generally included in front of each folder, and may include negatives.

Box 47

**Photographic Essays 1976-2007**

Box 48-49

**Oversized Photographs undated**

Boxes 50-54

**Personal Papers: research tools, awards, journals, poetry, artwork, self-portraits, and albums containing news articles 1975-2010**

Boxes 55

***From Closet to Community* (first draft, working copy, and editor's copy) 2000**

Box 56

**Handwritten notes and logs used by Ted Sahl for business purposes varied**