



CALIFORNIA ORIGINALS

A Quarterly Newsletter of the California State Archives
A Division of the California Secretary of State's Office
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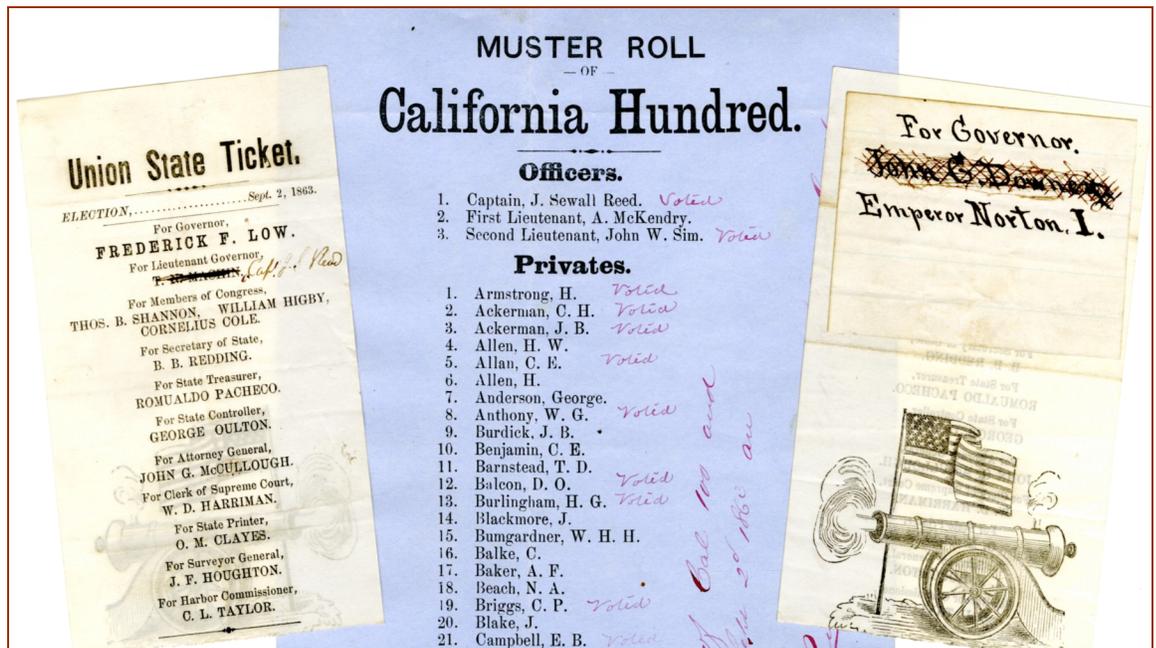
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California's First Absentee Ballots

As the Civil War raged in 1863, thousands of California soldiers were stationed throughout the United States. To ensure the right to vote for these soldiers, Governor Leland Stanford signed *An Act in addition to an Act to Regulate Elections, approved March twenty-third, eighteen hundred and fifty, and all Acts amendatory thereof and supplemental thereto* (Chapter 355, Statutes of 1863). This law required that all votes cast by California soldiers serving on election day “be sealed up by the commanding officer, and be by him forthwith transmitted, by mail or otherwise, to the Secretary of State at Sacramento.” Today these elections records are in the California State Archives.

Several hundred members of the famed California Battalion (fighting east of the Mississippi as part of the Second Massachusetts Cavalry) gathered on September 2, 1863, to cast their ballots at their post in Virginia. According to Sergeant Charles Roberts, “all seemed well pleased to have a chance to vote for our state officers.” In addition to the official slate of candidates, votes were cast for Captain James Reed (one of the Battalion’s bravest officers) for Lieutenant Governor, and for Emperor Norton (a well-known San Francisco eccentric) for Governor.



Although the Supreme Court of California overturned the law as unconstitutional in 1864, absentee voting returned in the 1920s. For many election cycles, registered voters could request absentee ballots if they had an excuse such as illness or vacation plans. Since 1979, any registered voter in California has had the option to vote by mail without providing an excuse. In an effort to highlight the convenience, a 2007 law changed the remote-voting terminology from “absentee” to “vote-by-mail.” By 2012, more than half of all ballots cast in the statewide general election were vote-by-mail ballots.

By Sebastian Nelson, Archivist

"Preserving and Promoting the History of California"

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From the State Archivist

Archivists have a job that is fundamental to a democracy. They provide access to public records and also help to ensure that people's rights are maintained. A number of years ago, while working as a reference archivist at the California State Archives, I handled a request from a southern California judge who was hearing a case involving a 1918 state law. At issue was whether the two parts of the law were still valid and enforceable or had been superseded by a 1934 state constitutional amendment. When gathering the records for the judge, I learned that one part of the law had been changed in 1934, but not the part that was central to the case. When he received copies of the records, the judge excitedly reported that the archival materials were helpful to the attorneys for both sides in the case. When I checked back with him about a month later, he told me the parties had settled their dispute likely because of the archival records. The work of archivists reaches far and wide, and is sometimes crucial in unexpected ways.

Nancy Zimmerman Lenoil, State Archivist

Program Notes

Legislative Records Program

Legislative records are a rich source of information about the history of state government and can be used to study key issues that have affected California. In particular, bill and committee hearing files can provide a better understanding of lawmakers' intent when they drafted legislation. The California State Archives holds the most extensive collection of California legislative records in the state and is the only repository to which legislative committee records may legally be transferred. More than 300 legislators have also sent their key papers to the State Archives. Together, these records make up about 10 percent of the State Archives' holdings. Through the Legislative Records Program, reference archivists can assist researchers with finding legislative history or determining legislative intent. The reference archivists also reach out to legislators and their staff to make certain that legislative records of enduring historical value are transferred to the State Archives in a timely manner. The program has made an impact. While legislative records for the years prior to 1960 are minimal, more recent legislative records are routinely transferred to the State Archives. More information about the legislative records open for research at the State Archives is in our online catalog, [Minerva](#).

By Rebecca Wendt, Archivist

Meet the Staff

Melodi Andersen, Archivist

Melodi Andersen has worked in state government for more than 30 years. She attended San Jose State University and received her Bachelor of Arts degree in social science. After moving to Sacramento, Melodi worked at the California Department of Transportation for a few years before taking a position as an office supervisor with the California State Archives in 1982. Melodi says, "I knew very little about the State Archives but I soon realized I liked the work and I wanted to be an archivist." To fulfill that wish, Melodi attended the first Western Archives Institute, an intensive two-week training sponsored by the Society of California Archivists and the State Archives. Continuing her education, Melodi took graduate classes at Sacramento State University and, after completion of the coursework, she was promoted to be an archivist. Over her years of service, Melodi has worked in nearly every archival program area. For the past 10 years, she has been the co-lead of the Reference Program, which she identifies as her favorite because it involves helping the public and answering questions posed by a wide variety of patrons.

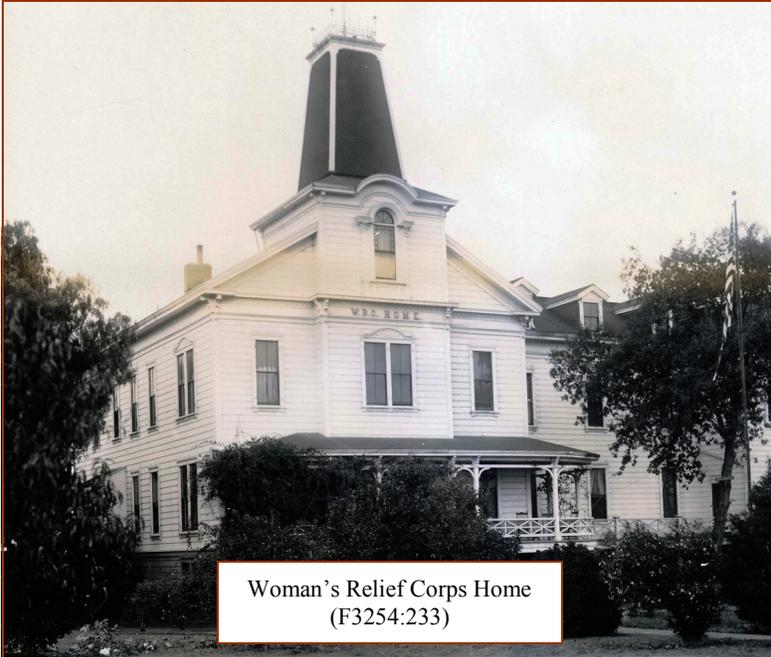




Records in the Spotlight

Woman's Relief Corps Home of California

A web search for “women’s auxiliaries” results in hundreds of thousands of organizations that work independently of, or provide support for, larger organizations through fundraising, volunteerism, and/or charitable work. Before women could vote or serve in civil capacities these auxiliaries, clubs, and other associations were the means by which women participated in social, moral, and civil reforms.



Woman's Relief Corps Home
(F3254:233)

In 1886, the formation of one such group began as a fundraising effort by the women’s auxiliary of a Civil War veterans association and resulted in a cooperative private-public home for ex-army nurses, widows, mothers, sisters, and daughters of Civil War Union veterans. The Woman’s Relief Corps Home of California (WRCH) was the first institution of its kind in the United States, housing its first resident in 1889.

The original WRCH located near San Jose was a two-story frame structure with 27 rooms. By 1897, the California Legislature stepped in to cover debts related to facility maintenance and provide funds for the ongoing operation of the home. More importantly, legislation established a pattern of government involvement in the management of WRCH until it closed in 1962. When fire destroyed the home in 1920, neighbors provided for the immediate needs of the home’s residents until they were moved to the Columbia and East Columbia hospitals. Within a year, a new home was constructed on 18 acres in rural Santa Clara County.

Full administration and care of WRCH was turned over to the California Department of Veterans Affairs in 1946. The last resident of the home was moved to a private nursing home in 1961. After WRCH was closed, the property was transferred to the University of California. Legislation in 1968 repealed all remaining statutes regarding the home.

WRCH records (ID number F3418) are in a small three-cubic-foot cache of materials from the California Department of Veterans Affairs. Related materials can be found in California statutes and articles of incorporation, and photographs of the homes are in California Department of Finance records.

By Sydney Bailey, Archivist

Recently Processed Records

State Agency Records

- Law Revision Commission
- Commission on the Status of Women
- Cooperative Area Manpower Planning System

State Legislature Records

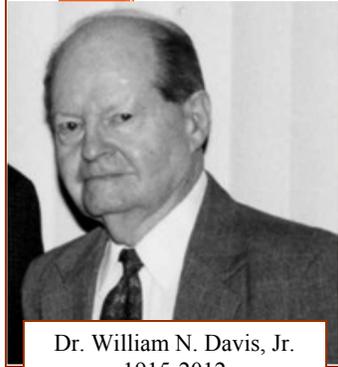
- Assembly Human Services Committee
- Robert Frazee Papers

Check Minerva, our online catalog, as well as the Online Archive of California, for descriptions of the Archives’ records!



In Memoriam

William N. Davis, Jr. California State Archivist, 1955-1980



Dr. William N. Davis, Jr.
1915-2012

Former State Archivist Dr. William N. Davis, Jr., passed away at age 97 on September 26, 2012. Davis was born in January 1915 in Kingsburg, California, and grew up in nearby Dinuba. He graduated from Fresno State College in 1936 and later earned a Master of Arts and a doctoral degree in history from the University of California, Berkeley.

Davis served in the Army Air Corps intelligence division during World War II. After the war, he taught history at San Francisco Junior College, the University of Missouri, and the University of California, Berkeley, before joining state government service in 1955 as the State Historian in the State Archives Division of the California Secretary of State's Office. In 1966, Davis became State Archivist and Chief of the Archives Division, and served in the position until he retired in 1980.

During his tenure as State Archivist, Davis promoted the use of modern archival theory and practices, increased professionalism among staff, developed an exhibit program, and championed the need for a new State Archives building. He was a member and officer of numerous state and national archival and historical organizations. In 1967, he became a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists – the highest honor within the American archival community. As State Archivist, he also served as secretary of the California Heritage Preservation Commission and as state coordinator of the California Historical Records Advisory Board.

By Laren Metzger, Deputy State Archivist

Upcoming Events

April 11-13	Society of California Archivists Annual General Meeting	www.calarchivists.org
April 26-28	National History Day, California State Finals	www.historydaycalifornia.org
April 26, May 31, June 28	Monthly Public Tours of California State Archives	www.sos.ca.gov/archives/tours.htm

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