

## UC San Diego Libraries Acquire Papers of San Diego Pioneer Ephraim W. Morse

*A big chunk of San Diego history—hundreds of letters, records, photographs, and other memorabilia tracing region's formative years— finds its way back home*

December 9, 2008

Dolores Davies

The University of California, San Diego Libraries have acquired the papers of Ephraim Weed Morse, an energetic and ambitious mover-and-shaker who lived in San Diego from 1850 until his death in 1906, and played a leading role in the development of early San Diego.

The Ephraim W. Morse Family Papers comprise one of the largest and most comprehensive private collections covering San Diego history in the 19th century. The archive includes extensive correspondence between Morse and his business partners and fellow San Diego trail blazers Alonzo Horton and Thomas Whaley, detailing their many plans and schemes for turning San Diego into a first-class destination. The collection also includes diaries, business records, civic papers, and newspaper clippings, documenting Morse's action-packed and tumultuous life and times in a rapidly changing San Diego.

"This rich and substantive archive forms an important cornerstone of early San Diego history," said Steven Erie, director of UC San Diego's Urban Studies and Planning Program. "Having this treasure trove of letters, civic papers and records, and other memorabilia here in San Diego is a major benefit for students and scholars of San Diego history, at UC San Diego and beyond. The mid-late 1800's were a critical time in San Diego's development as a city. The Morse Papers reflect that history in a very candid, open, and accessible way."

A civic booster, entrepreneur, rancher, judge, land developer, and lobbyist, Morse was instrumental in the formation of San Diego's early business community. In 1869, his actions as a City trustee led to the establishment of downtown San Diego and paved the way for the development of one of the city's crown jewels, Balboa Park. As a City trustee, Morse voted to sell Alonzo Horton the land grant that would later become downtown San Diego and also persuaded the trustees to dedicate a large plot of land for a city park- today's Balboa Park.

"We are thrilled to be able to bring the papers of the Morse family back to San Diego, their rightful home," said Brian E. C. Schottlaender, the Audrey Geisel University Librarian at the UC San Diego Libraries. "UC San Diego is a top academic center for the study of the American West, Latin America, and the Pacific region. This collection will help to strengthen that focus, which will benefit our students and faculty as well as San Diegans."

According to Schottlaender, the Morse Family Papers will complement other outstanding collections at the UC San Diego Mandeville Special Collections Library covering the early history of San Diego, California, Baja California, and the Pacific, including the Ed Fletcher Papers, the John B. and Jessie H. Goodman Collection, the Baja California Collection, and the Hill Collection of Pacific Voyages. The Friends of the UC San Diego Libraries and San Diego business leaders John Davies, Christopher Sickels, Terry Brown, Henry Hunte, Bud Alessio, Martin Dickinson, and James Hall assisted the Libraries in acquiring the Morse Family Papers, along with Neil and Judith Morgan.

The acquisition of the Morse Family Papers also complements a collection held by the San Diego Historical Society, which includes correspondence between Morse and his business associates in San Francisco and on the East Coast, as well as a variety of business records and related documents.

Morse, born and raised in Massachusetts, joined the mad dash to California in the 1849 Gold Rush, arriving in San Francisco in July 1849 after an arduous four-month voyage by sea. Like many, he soon became disillusioned with his gold mining prospects and headed south to San Diego, which at the time was a tiny settlement of about 800 people. Over the next three decades, he was tapped for numerous civic responsibilities and at various times served as city trustee, county supervisor, associate justice, city treasurer, county treasurer, school commissioner and trustee, and secretary of the board of trade.

Always a bold advocate for investing in San Diego's future, Morse's schemes - including a sheep farm on Palomar Mountain and a copper mine in Baja California-did not always pay off. He was a tireless promoter of bringing a transcontinental railroad to San Diego, and engaged in numerous real estate schemes hinged upon that outcome. Unfortunately, he was opposed by the formidable "Big Four," a group of powerful San Francisco businessmen-Leland Stanford, Colis Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins-who were instrumental in building the Central Pacific Railroad. With the failure to bring a transcontinental railroad to San Diego, coupled with a series of national financial panics-including the panic of 1873-Morse ended up losing most of his fortune.

In addition to the more than 1000 pages of letters written to Morse as well as letters written by Morse to family members still in New England, the papers include a wide range of ephemera, including Chamber of Commerce and newspaper advertisements, restaurant menus, and political campaign pamphlets. These materials-often humorous-shine a spotlight on the cultural and social mores and customs of that era, demonstrating that in spite of the passing of about 150 years, some things never really change. Not unlike today, real estate, the price of food, and sex appeal seemed to loom large in the media and public consciousness of the mid-1800s.

A San Diego County Chamber of Commerce pamphlet, titled *Cheap Lands in California and How to Use Them* bemoans the misperception spread by Easterners that "Southern California lands are all too high..." and argues that the San Diego location can't be beat: "There are no backwoods privations to be undergone, no frontier dangers to be incurred, nor does it now take a whole day to visit your nearest neighbor or get a horse shod."

In the "read it and weep" category, a 1901 property tax bill for a 65-acre tract of land amounted to \$7.15. A pre-Thanksgiving article in the San Diego Union newspaper warned readers of the rising costs of a traditional turkey dinner, with turkeys at 30 cents a pound and cranberries retailing at 15 cents a quart. Apparently, the local stock of turkeys (from Escondido) was not sufficient to meet consumer demand that year so more turkeys had to be shipped in from Kansas.

Large, prominently displayed advertisements in the San Diego Union newspaper resemble modern-day Viagra ads, promising to ensure "love and a happy home." The ads promised confidentiality and assured buyers that the miracle elixir would be delivered in a plain, sealed envelope.

Among his myriad business interests, Morse was founder and officer of the Bank of San Diego. He helped to develop downtown San Diego by building the Pierce-Morse block located at the northwest corner of Sixth and F Street, and the Morse, Whaley, and Dalton Block. He was a business partner in various business and real estate ventures with Thomas Whaley, including the San Diego Flume Company and the El Cajon Valley Company.

While Morse's hyperactive deal-making and networking seemed to occupy much of his time, like many San Diegans before and after him, he clearly found solace in San Diego's benign climate, its natural coastal and back country beauty, and its agricultural abundance. An avid beekeeper, Morse presided over the San Diego Beekeepers Association, and, along with his wife, Mary, reveled in growing fruits and flowers year-round. Both were also gardeners and enjoyed driving their horse and buggy into the San Diego wilderness to camp in the mountains and countryside.

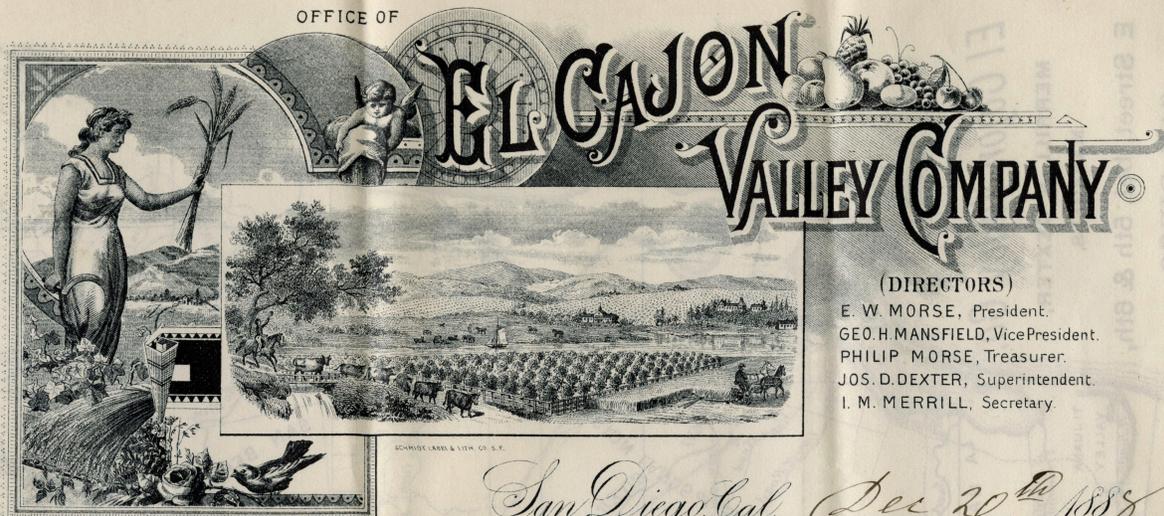
The Mandeville Special Collections Library is a major repository for rare and distinctive books, periodicals, maps, photographs, art works, recordings, and a wide range of archives to support teaching and scholarly research at the UC San Diego. The Library houses many irreplaceable, one-of-a-kind collections, including: the Southworth Spanish Civil War Collection, the largest collection of its kind in the world; extensive holdings on California history and culture and Baja California history and politics; the Archive for New Poetry, one of the most comprehensive archives of poetry in the WWII era; and the Dr. Seuss Collection, a significant repository of the original art and works of Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss), which includes more than 8,500 items documenting the full range of Geisel's creative achievements.

Ranked among the nation's top academic research libraries, the UC San Diego Libraries play an integral role in advancing and supporting the university's research, teaching, and public service missions. As the intellectual heart of the UC San Diego campus, the nine university libraries provide access to more than 7 million digital and print volumes, journals, and multimedia materials to meet the knowledge and information needs of faculty, students, and members of the public. Each day, more than 7,300 patrons visit one of the UCSD libraries and more than 87,000 people access library resources through the UCSD Libraries main Web site.

Media Contact: Dolores Davies, 858-534-0667



OFFICE OF



**EL CAJON VALLEY COMPANY**

(DIRECTORS)

E. W. MORSE, President.  
 GEO. H. MANSFIELD, Vice President.  
 PHILIP MORSE, Treasurer.  
 JOS. D. DEXTER, Superintendent.  
 I. M. MERRILL, Secretary.

San Diego, Cal. Dec 20<sup>th</sup> 1888

Dear Edward

Yours of Dec (blank) came duly to hand. Reports from all parts of New England confirm your statement of very stormy weather. I have been so long away from the regions of storms, that I can hardly realize what a storm is in reality. but I do realize what a wonderful climate is this San Diego climate - no cold, no heat, no storms, no wind beyond a gentle breeze, more than 300 days in every year delightfully soft and balmy from sunrise to sunset, with no wind at all during the night. - ahew!!!

I am now sitting in my office writing this with windows up and doors open, neither too warm nor too cold but just right.

# A LUNCH COUNTER

FOR YOUR ACCOMMODATION

Coffee, Tea, Milk, Cocoa,  
Lemonade, Horlick's Malted  
Milk or Hot Milk

— WITH —

Rolls, Snails, Doughnuts,  
Sandwich, Crackers, Bread  
and Butter, Granose Biscuit,  
Schredded Wheat Biscuit,  
Cream Puff, Cookies or

Zwieback . . . . . 5c

Milk Toast . . . . . 5c

Granose Mush and Milk 5c

Bread and Milk . . . . . 5c

Grape Nuts with Milk . 5c

Malta Vita " " . 5c

Brittle Bits " " . 5c

Flaked Rice " " . 5c

Force with Milk . . . . . 5c

2 Cream Puffs . . . . . 5c

2 Sandwiches . . . . . 5c

*Baked Apples* 5

Pie . . . . . 5c

Baked Beans . . . . . 5c

Sardines . . . . . ~~15c~~ 10

Beef Tea . . . . . 10c

MELONS IN THEIR SEASON  
SANDWICHES FOR LUNCHES TO ORDER

FOR CONVENIENCE, PLEASE PAY WHEN  
YOU GET YOUR ORDER.

(OVER)

C. G. VREELAND, Manager.

CHEAP LANDS  
IN  
**CALIFORNIA**

AND  
HOW TO USE THEM.

—◆—  
ISSUED BY THE  
Chamber of Commerce,  
OF  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY.

—◆—  
This may be mailed for one cent, or in an ordinary  
letter without increasing postage.

—◆—  
SAN DIEGO:  
*California Printing Company.*  
1889.

