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SWETT-TRACY
FAMILY PAPERS
Circa 1698-1943 (bulk 1836-1937)
BANC MSS 91/206 CZ

John Swett, 1830-1913

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Provenance: The Swett-Tracy Family papers were donated to The Bancroft Library, University of California, in 1990 by Conrad T. Knoll on behalf of the Margaret (“Peg”) Plummer estate and the Plummer and Knoll families, descendants of John Swett.

Size: 16.4 linear feet (14 cartons, 3 oversize volumes)

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Preferred Citation: Swett-Tracy family papers, BANC MSS 91/206 cz
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Items transferred: Photographs transferred to the Pictorial Collections of The Bancroft Library
John Swett was a politician, teacher and principal, and a close friend of John Muir. Born in Pittsfield, New Hampshire on July 31st, 1830, Swett arrived in California in 1853 with the short-lived idea of mining gold, but quickly became principal of the Rincon School in San Francisco. He married Mary Louise (born Mary Louise Tracy on December 8th, 1839 in Thompson, CT) on May 8th, 1862 in Sonoma, California. They had 8 children. This same year he was elected as the 4th California State Superintendent of Public Instruction and served until 1868. Under his administration, his most important accomplishment was making the California school system free for all students. Defeated for reelection, John became principal of Denman School in San Francisco from 1876 to 1889, and city school superintendent from 1890 to 1896. He then retired to a fruit farm in Martinez, California where he resided until his death on August 22nd, 1913.
Swett-Tracy Family Papers  
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The papers of the Swett-Tracy family collection spans more than 200 years, from 1698 to 1943. However, the bulk of the collection spans the years from 1836 to 1937. The materials consist of personal and business correspondence, subject files; financial papers, personal diaries, scrapbooks and materials related to John Swett’s career as an educator and have been arranged in 14 cartons and 3 oversized volumes (discussed in more detail in the series description).

The bulk of the material centers on John Swett (1830-1913). In addition to personal correspondence (letters to his wife, birthday correspondence), there’s an unattributed memoir, miscellaneous incoming correspondence both personal and professional from 1865-1913, letters to his son, Frank Swett (b.1869-d.1969), and professional correspondence including a UC letter from 1904 and a speech from 1905. Other material relates to his funeral and death.

Other material centers on John Swett’s wife, Mary Louise (1839-?), and her personal correspondence mostly to her husband between 1860 and 1899 and their daughter Helen Swett. Other material contains correspondence regarding suffrage.

The other major contributor to this collection is Helen Swett (born April 7th, 1875), John and Mary Louise’s daughter. The material contains papers from her life and career mostly relating to her work in social welfare.

See also the following related collections in the Manuscripts Division:
BANC MSS C-B 352: John Swett papers
BANC MSS 99/175 c: John Swett and Son records
BANC MSS 69/37 c: California agricultural cooperatives: typed transcript of interviews with Frank Tracy Swett
BANC MSS C-B 353: Helen Swett letter to her fiancé, Charles E. Schwartz
BANC MSS Z-Z 107: Tracy family papers
BANC MSS 95/123 c: Materials relating to the Swett family: typescript

Photographs transferred to the Pictorial Collections of The Bancroft Library
The Swett-Tracy Family Papers consist of 14 cartons and 3 oversized volumes. The papers range circa 1698 to 1943 with the bulk from 1836 to 1937. Most correspondence is still in the original envelopes; other documents are often folded. Most materials are in manila envelopes with descriptions of contents written on the outside in cartons 1 through 5. Most, but not all, materials in cartons 6 through 14 are in folders.

Cartons 1 through 5: John Swett and Mary Louise Swett’s correspondence; 1860s-1910s.

Carton 1 contains John Swett and Mary Louise Swett’s personal correspondence (1860-1899), and papers related to Mary Louise’s professional concerns (1899-1913).

Carton 2 contains Mary Louise and Helen Swett’s letters from 1890’s-1917, Lucretia F. Barry (John’s mother; died 1896) letters, Emily Tracy diaries circa 1860’s-1880’s, and Pacific Coast Women’s Press Association materials circa 1892-1914.

Carton 3 contains personal correspondence addressed to Mary Louise including materials relating to suffrage. Letters to and from Lucretia Barry. An unattributed memoir believed to be that of John Swett.

Carton 4 contains John Swett materials including California Pear Growers Association newsletters (1930’s), farming reference manuals, correspondence between Mary Louise and Helen Swett (1892-1913), scrapbooks, journals and literary magazines circa 1903-1918.

Carton 5 contains John Swett’s miscellaneous personal and professional correspondence, circa 1865-1913.

Cartons 6 – 10: Helen Swett’s miscellaneous materials circa early 20th century. Cartons contain materials from Helen Swett’s life and career relating to her work with social welfare.

Carton 11 & 12: Tracy Family Papers; circa 1754-1850
Cartons contain Tracy family genealogy, journals, travel diaries (1836-1839), scrapbooks, a handwritten book of European history, abolitionist publications, and materials relating to Frederic P. Tracy, Mary Louise’s father.

Carton 13: Miscellaneous Swett Family Papers; circa 1840-1893
Carton contains various Swett family member letters, business and financial papers, photographs of Swett and John Muir’s family.

Carton 14: Photographs of Swett family members.