

History Center of San Luis Obispo County

Guide to the SLO Center's Gin/ Louis Family Collection

Title:

Gin/ Louis Family Collection

Dates:

1830-1977, bulk 1910-1960

Local Identifier:

1998.003

Repository Location:

San Luis Obispo History Center
696 Monterey Street
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Repository Code:

CSluHi

Extent:

12 Page Boxes

12 Hollinger Boxes

Approximately 19.17 Linear Feet

Creators:

Louis, Wong Young (Jung Yeong), 1893-1988

Louis, Stella Chandler, 1897-1996

Louis, George Ah Him, 1899-1993

Louis, Mae, 1895-1988

Louis, Elsie, 1914-2008

Gin, Carol

Scope and Content:

The Gin/Louis Family Collection contains both nineteenth and twentieth century personal and professional items of Wong Young Louis, a prominent Chinese-American photographer and film projectionist born in San Luis Obispo, California. He is the eldest son of Ah Louis, a Chinese entrepreneurial pioneer who helped to establish San Luis Obispo's Chinatown and its commerce beginning in 1874.

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Personal items include photos, graphics, prints, film, negatives, and family records. Also included are business receipts and photographs from Young Louis' Photoshops active from the 1940's-1950's.

The collection was donated in 1998 by Carol Gin, a relative of the Louis family.

Language:

English, French, German, Chinese

Genres and Forms of Material:

Business Records

Correspondence

Ephemera

Film negatives

Photographs

School Books

Music Books

Biographical Note

In total, Ah Luis had eight children that he had raised in San Luis Obispo. His oldest son, Young Louis also was a major influence in the San Luis Obispo area. He was a movie projectionist for San Luis Obispo's Palm Theater, a movie projectionist and stage manager who personally worked for William Randolph Hearst at Hearst Castle, and one of the first Chinese Americans to graduate from the California State Polytechnic College in San Luis Obispo. He married Stella Chandler and together they both founded the Chinese Student Association at Cal Poly SLO, an organization that brought together Chinese Americans all from first, second, and third generations and provided a comfortable circle for the Chinese minority on campus to learn Chinese tradition through Lion Dancing and promote Chinese culture both on campus and to the San Luis Obispo area. Among other achievements, Young Louis was a professional photographer who owned his own studio in San Luis Obispo on Chorro Street, a muralist, and an artist.

Young's father Ah Louis, also known by his Chinese name Wong On, immigrated to the United States during the 1850's in pursuit of the gold rush. He eventually settled in San Luis Obispo in 1870 and acted as a laborer contractor, organizing crews of Chinese immigrants to help construct the Pacific Coast Railroad, mine the quicksilver mines near the town of Cambria, and drain the Laguna Lake area as well as the swampland between San Luis Obispo and Pismo Beach in 1882. He also operated a Chinese goods shop on Chorro Street in the Chinatown district of San Luis Obispo, operated as a banker to the Chinese, owned a brickyard, and produced seed farms selling his produce to the American navy and armies during both World War I and World War II.

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Sources

Dart, Louisiana Clayton. "The History of Ah Louis Store in San Luis Obispo." *California Historian* 12, no. 2 (1965): 38-39.

San Luis Obispo County History Center. "The Chinese in San Luis Obispo County, Special Exhibit, February-March 1981, 25th Anniversary, San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum." Pamphlet, San Luis Obispo, 1981.

Wong, H. K. *Gum Sahn Yun (Gold Mountain Men)*. California: Fong Bros. Print., 1987.

Scope and Content Note

The Gin/Louis Collection contains family keepsakes, school books, and photos and receipts from Young Louis's photography studio. The Louis family were pioneers of San Luis Obispo and founding members of the city's Chinese community.

The Gin/Louis Collection is organized in two series:

Series 1. Personal Papers

Subseries A: Photographs

Subseries A-1: Personal Photographs & Albums

Boxes: 1321, all 98.3 Hollinger boxes

Subseries A-2: Imagery/Film/Photography Collection

Boxes: 1296, 1320, 1331, 1333

Subseries B: Books

Subseries B-1: Sheet Music & Music Books

Boxes: 1326

Subseries B-2: School Books

Boxes: 1333

Subseries C: Ephemera

Boxes: 1323, 1328, 1321

Series 2: Professional Papers

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Subseries A: Studio Photographs

Boxes: 1330, 1332, 1337

The collection spans two generations of the Louis family. This includes Ah Louis' children, his children's spouses, as well as Ah Louis' grandchildren, particularly Elsie Louis. These records date from the 1850's through the 1950's.

The Personal Series consists of ephemera, books, records, and photos that pertain to Young Louis's family and social life. These items reflect Young's hobbies such as music, photography, film, and art. Also included are his collected mementos, objects like books, souvenirs, and photos from traveling, social events in the San Luis Obispo area, and family events. This series also includes objects that reflect the historical periods in which he lived. These items include newspapers covering pieces on World War II, articles written on the Louis family in San Luis Obispo, Chinese American history on the central coast of California, and music books on jazz and classical compositions that convey the aesthetic tastes of both the Victorian Era and the jazz age of the 1920's through the Great Depression. Not only is this series a reflection on the life of Young Louis but also a micro history of the social, political, and cultural environments of the rapidly changing twentieth century in which a second generation Chinese American lived.

The Professional Series consists of over two hundred photos, most of which are remnants of Young Louis's customers' photo orders, along with their receipts of purchase. This series is significant in that it offers names and photos of families and individuals that lived within and around the San Luis Obispo area. The images offer insight into the lifestyle, culture, ethnic diversity, and development of the area during the 1940's and 1950's as well as the continuing prominence of the Louis family as entrepreneurs in the San Luis Obispo area.

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Series 1. Personal Papers, 1912-1977

Contains 3 subseries: A. Photographs (subseries A-1 Personal Photographs & Albums, A-2 Imagery/Film/ Photography Collection), B. Books (subseries B-1 Sheet Music & Music Books, subseries B-2 School Books), C. Ephemera

Subseries A: Photographs

Contains photos of the Louis family and Young's family from the early twentieth century to 1977.

Subseries A-1: Personal Photographs & Albums

Box 1321

Photos of Young, Stella, and Elsie. Other photos include the Chang and Low family.

Boxes 98.3

Contain photos of friends and family of Young Louis and the social events they attended in San Luis Obispo

Subseries A-2: Imagery/Film/Photography Collection, 1912-1985

Contains Young Louis' personal collection of photos, negatives, photo slides, and film reel edits.

Box 1296

Contains framed Cal Poly SLO awards for Stella and Young and framed photos photographed by Young Louis.

Box 1320

Contains photography certificates and licenses in Young Louis' name

Box 1331

Contains photo slide carousels (3) and box collections of photo slides (2)

Box 1333

Contains pamphlets on colored photos of Tokyo, photo negatives, and film reel edits.

Subseries B: Books

Subseries B-1: Sheet Music & Music Books, 1859-1931

Box 1326

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Contains sheet music from the Jazz era of the late 1910's through the 1930's. Also includes German and French Program pamphlets with the classical music scores attached. Music training books dating from 1859 and 1887.

Subseries B-2: School Books, 1908-1915

Box 1333

Contains Gregg Shorthand, English, Guides to Book Keeping, Arithmetic, and Letter Writing booklets all owned by Mae and George Louis. Also included are lined paper notebooks.

Subseries C: Ephemera, 1830-1957

Box 1321

Contains items from Young and Stella's wedding anniversary of 1977 including napkins, guest books, invitations, and candles

Box 1323

Contains postcards of Young's travels, photos of family friends, bank deposit sheets, pamphlets and programs of social events, and other mementos.

Box 1328

Contains family memory blanket, tools for burnishing metals, dominoes set, and a trophy for Young and Stella Louis from Cal Poly SLO dated 1937

Series 2: Professional Papers, 1912-1957

Contains one subseries A: Studio Photographs

Subseries A: Studio Photographs

Contains receipts of customer orders, photos, and frames from Young Louis' Studio.

Box 1330

Contains black and white and color photos, negatives, and framed photos with receipts of customers' names, delivery addresses, and the date they were taken. Dates range from 1912-1952.

Box 1332

Contains both color and black and white photos, portrait sketches, negatives, and receipts of customers' names, delivery addresses, and the date they were taken. Dates range from 1948-1957.

Box 1337

Contains black and white photos with receipts of customers' names, delivery addresses, and the date they were taken. Photos all date to 1953.

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