



Notes from the Archive

Seaver Center for Western History Research

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

June 2019

Welcome to the first issue of Notes from the Archive, a publication of the Seaver Center for Western History Research. If you are informed by what you read here, please share it with a friend or colleague.

Collection Highlight:

Alcalde/Los Angeles County Court Records
1830-1863

THE COLLECTION

The records of criminal, civil and probate cases include the Court of Sessions and court of the First Judicial District, ranging from 1830 to 1863. It is a small collection when compared to the Huntington Library's largest collection of Los Angeles-area court documents, dating from 1850 through 1910.

The word *alcalde* originated in Spain with the Arabic term, *Al-Caid*, meaning a town justice. In colonial California, the *alcalde ordinario*, elected yearly, was usually unpaid and attended to minor matters within the towns, along with *regidores* (councilmen) and *alguacil* (sheriff). (Source: William M. Mason)

THE AUTHOR



Plan your research visit

Call 213.763.3359 or
Email seavercenter@nhm.org
Open by appointment
Monday and Thursday
10-noon and 1-4 p.m.

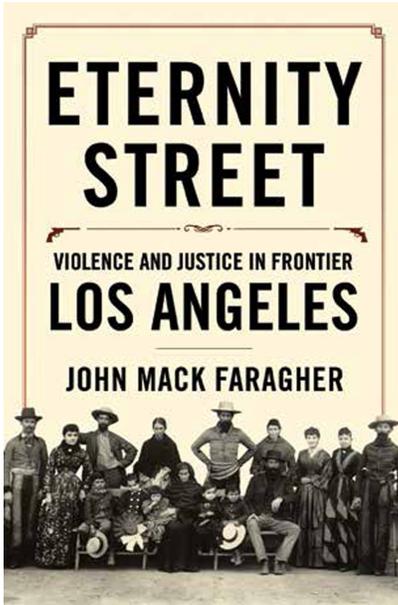
The Collections

Search through the [Online Archive of California](#)

- over 370 general collections
- over 290 photographic collections

Digitized Collections

John Mack Faragher, Professor of History at Yale University, relied on all of these court documents to research and publish *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles*, published in 2016 by W.W. Norton and Co.



Upon its release, the book gained wide attention, including the following review by William Deverell in the Los Angeles Review of Books: [L.A.: "A Place People Hacked One Another to Pieces with Pistols."](#)

THE RESEARCHER

Recently, Jose Lumbreras, a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of California, San Diego visited the Seaver Center to review the Alcalde/L.A. County Court Records.



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The collections are a part of the History Department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The Seaver Center opened in 1986 through a generous grant from the Seaver Institute.

Upcoming Events

Stay tuned!

Jose is writing a social and cultural history of early Los Angeles during the transitional era from a Mexican pueblo to an American town, 1850-1860. For his research, Jose is examining how these court cases could provide a window to the historical experiences of ordinary Angelenos who witnessed the violent atmosphere of early Los Angeles. Specifically, he is investigating how the testimonies of laborers, clerks, storekeepers, lawyers, card dealers, miners, and carpenters could offer a rich narrative on how gender roles informed the culture of the streets, saloons, and main roads of early Los Angeles.

He has found that these court records include testimonies that share a history of Los Angeles on the ground. It provides a unique collection that dates from the Spanish and Mexican era — stopping just before the end of the American Civil War. The Alcalde/L.A. County Records, 1830-1863 Collection is an important historical source that holds significant information about the social and cultural history of early Los Angeles.



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