

GC 1248
Vignes Family Papers

Repository:

Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Span Dates:

1843-1901

Extent:

1 legal; 1 ov folder

Acquisition Information:

The Vignes Family Papers include collections from several different accessions which have been combined as they all relate to the same family. However, within the collection, the papers have been separated by their respective accession numbers in order to respect the principle of provenance.

Language:

French; transcriptions and English translations

Abstract:

The Vignes were prominent members of a small but influential French community in 19th century Los Angeles. The family patriarch was Jean-Louis Vignes who left Cadillac, France in 1826, arriving in El Dorado, California in 1831. (Vignes remained in Los Angeles until his death in 1863.) The creators of this collection, however, were Pierre Vignes, brother of Jean-Louis, and Pierre's son, Vital Ferdinand Vignes. The diary of Pierre Vignes documents his seven-year (1844-1851) sojourn in California as well as the two years prior during his actual journey from France. The collection also holds letters, legal documents, photographs, and wine-making notes belonging to Vital Ferdinand Vignes. Two of the most interesting letters are from John Augustus Sutter to Vital Ferdinand, dated 1852 and 1856.

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Conditions Governing Access:

Research is by appointment only

Preferred Citation:

Vignes Family Papers, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History

Biographical Note:

The Vignes were prominent members of a small but influential French community in 19th century Los Angeles. The family patriarch was Jean-Louis Vignes who left Cadillac, France in 1826, arriving in El Dorado, California in 1831. (Vignes remained in Los Angeles until his death in 1863.) He bought a tract of land adjacent to the Los Angeles River (near the present location of Alameda Street and south of Aliso Street) and laid out El Aliso Vineyard, named for the huge sycamore which shaded it—a misnomer; “aliso” actually means alder. (Vignes’s neighbors then called him Don Luis del Aliso.) Vignes, whose name means “vines” in French, became the most important winemaker in the West, producing as many as forty thousand gallons a year, and is today considered a pioneer of California viticulture. (He also planted what was probably the first orange grove in the city of Los Angeles.) Two present-day Los Angeles thoroughfares, Vignes and Aliso streets, are named for this pioneering family.

Pierre Vignes was Jean-Louis’s brother and the author of the diary in this collection. He married Catherine Lataste in 1816; the couple then had four girls and a boy, though one of the girls died at two years old. Though trained as a cooper, Pierre shifted to trade and moved from Cadillac to Beguey where he had bought a house with a small vineyard and a garden.

In 1843, Pierre emigrated to California to work for his successful brother, leaving behind his wife and children. (Pierre’s nephew, Pierre Sansevain was also living in California.) Pierre arrived in the pueblo of Los Angeles in June, 1844 and began working in Jean-Louis Vignes’ vineyard—104 acres situated on the bank of the river, across from the pueblo.

The diary of Pierre Vignes documents many of the highlights of his life in California between 1843 and 1851. (See Scope and Content Note below.) At 59 years old, Pierre returned to France to his wife and family, leaving one of his sons, Vital Ferdinand Vignes, in charge of his orchards and fields. Pierre died on November 26, 1857, in Beguey, France.

Pierre’s son, Vital Ferdinand, began working his father’s orchards in San Jose but later re-located to the Vignes-Sansevain vineyards and orchards in Los Angeles. (Vital Ferdinand’s wife had refused to accompany him on the long voyage to California and died in France. Vital Ferdinand later married Emma Lecroq; the couple had five children.) Vital Ferdinand took over the selling of fruit, wheat, grapes, wine, and other products now in demand with California’s rapid growth. This explains the notes and recipes for tartar and other such items which he requested from his contact in Bordeaux,

Francois Vallette, or which he kept in dated note form, following his experiments in producing them.

For more information on the Vignes family and their role in California's viticulture industry, see Vincent P. Carosso's *The California Wine Industry: A Study of the Formative Years* (UC Berkeley, 1951).

Scope and Content Note:

Letters, legal documents, photographs, and wine-making notes belonging to Vital Ferdinand Vignes; an 1886 auction broadside for the sale of the Vignes Tract; as well as photographs of the property.

One of the letters dated 1879 is from Vital Ferdinand's brother-in-law, O. Lecroq who had obviously come to California himself. (O. Lecroq was the brother of Emma, Ferdinand's second wife.)

Two of the most interesting letters are from John Augustus Sutter to Vital Ferdinand, dated 1852 and 1856. (It was at Sutter's Mill that gold was discovered in 1848, a turning point in California history.) In these letters, Sutter apologized to Vital Ferdinand for not being able to repay the money he owed him.

Another letter, written in 1901, is from Vital Ferdinand himself, now aged and ailing (and widowed?), to his son and daughter-in-law living in "Los Seritos" [sic].

The diary of Pierre Vignes documents his seven-year (1844-1851) sojourn in California as well as the two years prior during his actual journey from France. It contains the names and addresses of several people who probably had some business with him—e.g. merchants, dealers in various aspects of viticulture—and a reference to a gold watch, with gold-colored hands, and a gold-mounted agate as key. (When it was stolen, it became the subject of much concern.) There is a gap in the diary between 1840 and 1842, but there are several references to his journey to America in 1843. Many of the people he met on the ship as well as at the various ports are mentioned in his diary—including those to whom Pierre sold casks of brandy and other liquors. According to his diary, Pierre arrived in the pueblo of Los Angeles in June of 1844 where he went to work on Jean-Louis' vineyard. In March of 1845, he left the port of Los Angeles (San Pedro) and sailed to Santa Cruz where he arrived in August. His diary reveals his efforts to increase his earnings by selling iron and by working in the saw mill of Pierre Sansevain.

While he was living in Santa Cruz, Pierre witnessed several important events in California's history including the hoisting of the American flag on the Monterey custom house on July 7, 1846. In 1848, his fortunes improved when gold was found in large quantities in Northern California. He was able later to set up partnership with another Frenchman, Francois Lallemand. They took over the former orchard of Mission San Jose, the Huerta de San Cayento. Pierre and Francois grew wheat, pears, olives, and wine. Unfortunately, the partnership dissolved due to at least two incidents where Francois attacked Pierre while intoxicated. His wealth also left Pierre vulnerable to those

less prosperous, as he recorded in his diary an incident involving a “criminal attempt against my life from four Americans in my house...”

The letters and other written materials in the collection are all in French, though some of the letters have been transcribed and translated by Claudine Chambers; the diary has been transcribed and translated by Annick Foucrier.

Container List:

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	<p>Letter: Pierre Sansevain to Vital Ferdinand Vignes, 1/23/1845; includes envelope:</p> <p>Letter to Vital Ferdinand Vignes from Pierre Sansevain, Jan. 23, 1845. Pierre acknowledges that J.L. Vignes [i.e., Jean Louis Vignes], his uncle, “refuses what he promised to you so that you could go back to France... I know his nature so well that I am convinced that he’ll do all he can...to harm you...” [Information supplied by <i>The Scriptorium</i>.] one leaf. (Not translated). With envelope.</p>
2	<p>Letter: J.A. Sutter to Vital Ferdinand Vignes, 2/13-14, 1852</p> <p>Letter, in French, from John Sutter to Vital Vignes, Feb. 13/14, 1852. In his letter, Sutter discusses the money that he owes Vignes and his proposal for raising the sum, including selling some land between Hock Farm and Marysville or waiting for money due to him by the Federal Government “for having supplied the Battalion of Fremont with provisions, etc. when the American Forces took Possession of California...” Four leaves. (Translated).</p>
3	<p>Letter: J.A. Sutter to Vital Ferdinand Vignes, 3/28/1856</p> <p>Letter, in French, from John Sutter to Vital Vignes, Mar. 28, 1856. In this letter, Sutter explains the delay in repaying Vignes—the delay apparently caused by a dispute awaiting the decision of the United States district court. Sutter writes, “...I can show my patent to the Supreme Court of Washington, and unfortunately these bad squatters are still protected by our bad and dishonorable legislature by an act which they have passed lately in their favor and for the protection of the squatters even though it is against</p>

the Constitution of the United States...” 4 leaves.
(Translated).

4 Letters (2) to Vital Ferdinand Vignes, 1865 & 1870

Letter to Vital Ferdinand Vignes, Sept. 8, 1865.
The letter is in response to a letter from Vignes to his mother regarding a commission entrusted to Vignes’s mother on behalf of another member of the family, Romain. The issue seems to be a debt, and a proposed payback. [Information supplied by *The Scriptorium*.]
1 leaf.

Letter to Vital Ferdinand Vignes, Aug. 8, 1870. The letter announces that Vignes’s interests “in the case” have been permanently settled “in spite of the lawsuit that Romain has engaged against” Vignes. The letter goes on to discuss the situation between France and Prussia: “Right now we learned that our brave soldiers have been crushed by an overwhelming number of several fights, and obliged to retreat from the battlefield...” [Information supplied by *The Scriptorium*.] 2 leaves.

5 Legal documents (2) relating to Vital Ferdinand Vignes, 12/13/1864

Two legal documents, written in Bordeaux on Dec. 13, 1864 pertaining to Vital Vignes. (Untranslated). Michel Romain Vignes, farmer at Marmande, has engaged before the tribunal of commerce of Bordeaux a law suit against Vital Ferdinand Vignes and Jean Marie Vignes, merchants, living at Los Angeles, California, who owe him 1,688 dollars and are ordered to pay this sum. [Information supplied by *The Scriptorium*.] Two handwritten copies of the same item.

6 Legal document prepared by the Vice Consul of France at Los Angeles, 4/14/1869

Legal document, in French, prepared by the Vice Consul of France at Los Angeles, Apr. 14, 1869. Document declares Mr. Depiot, merchant residing in Cadillac, France. to be Vignes’s special recipient of certain real property described within the document which Vignes now wishes to reserve on behalf of

his mother. [Information supplied by *The Scriptorium*.]
Signed by Vital Ferdinand Vignes. 4 leaves.
(Untranslated).

- 7 Five envelopes addressed to Vital Ferdinand Vignes
- Five envelopes addressed to Vital Ferdinand Vignes:
- a) From Pierre Vignes, Bordeaux, 1853 to Don Fernando (for Vital Ferdinand Vignes) in Santa Cruz or San Francisco
 - b) From Cadillac, France , 1890, to Vital Ferdinand Vignes in Los Angeles
 - c) From Gironde, France, 1890, to Vital Ferdinand Vignes in Los Angeles
 - d) From [Ferdinand Vignes's mother], Cadillac, France, March 1872, to Vital Ferdinand Vignes in Los Angeles
 - e) From John A. Sutter, Marysville, 1852 to Vital Ferdinand Vignes in San Jose
- 8 Photographs (3) of East Los Angeles—corner of Downey Ave. & Hauser Streets. (Vignes property)
- Three cabinet cards of Vignes's property all labeled, "East Los Angeles—corner of Downey Ave. & Hauser Streets." (Three different views, 1886.) Prints made by F. G. Schumacher, Photo, Los Angeles. Photographs created at the time of the sale of the Vignes Tract.
- 9 Photograph: Reproduction of original (mid-19th century)—portrait of Vital Ferdinand Vignes
- 8" X 10" glossy reproduction of carte-de-visite of Vital Ferdinand Vignes. Original dates from mid-19th century.
- 9a Photograph: Reproduction of original (mid-19th century)—portrait of Vital Ferdinand Vignes
- 4" X 6" glossy reproduction of carte-de-visite of Vital Ferdinand Vignes. Original dates from mid-19th century.

- 9b Photograph: Original carte-de-visite (mid-19th century)—portrait of Vital Ferdinand Vignes
- Original carte-de-visite of Ferdinand Vital Vignes.
 Reverse of photo: *Tuttle V. Payne's Helio- Art Studio, Temple Block, Los Angeles, Cal.*
- 10 Photograph: Portrait of Emillé Vignes, Adèle Vignes (daughter of Emillé), & Eugenie Coulson (mother of Emillé)
- Mounted photograph of Emillé Vignes, Adèle Vignes (daughter of Emillé), and Eugenia Coulson (mother of Emillé), circa 1875
- 11 Photograph: Portrait of Ferdinand Vignes & Louis Vignes, circa 1875
- Mounted photograph of Ferdinand Vignes (b. circa 1870) and Louis Vignes (b. circa 1864), sons of Vital Ferdinand Vignes
- 12 Photograph: Portrait of Vital Ferdinand Vignes & family
- 13 Letter: to Ferdinand Vignes, 1/12/1865
- Letter, Jan. 12, 1865, to Ferdinand Vignes from Francois Vallette. Regarding shipment of material from France to San Francisco. 3 leaves.
- 14 Letter: O. Lecroq to Ferdinand Vignes, 3/15/1879
- Letter, O. Lecroq, Paris, to Ferdinand Vignes, March 15, 1879. Mostly family news. 2 leaves.
- 15 Letter: François Vallette to Monsieur Vignes, 5/12/1864
- Letter, Francois Vallette, Bordeaux, to Monsieur Vignes, May 12, 1864. Concerning details of beverage production. 1 leaf.
- 16 Letter: Vital F. Vignes to son, daughter-in-law, & family, 8/29/1901
- Letter, Vital Vignes to son, daughter-in-law, and family, Aug. 29, 1901. Family matters. 2 leaves.
- 17 Manuscript: Instructions for preparing wousky [whiskey?]

- Handwritten instructions in pencil for preparing wousky [sic]. 1 leaf.
- 18 Manuscript: Instructions for making beverages, 19th century
- Instructions, belonging to Vignes family, for making beverages. Two sketches of heating and distilling equipment. 2 leaves.
- 19 Manuscript: Instructions for making wine, 19th century
- Handwritten instructions for wine-making. Presumably to member of Vignes family from correspondent in France. Gives information such as temperature of water, amount of fuel, type of filters, and timing of steps. Four sketches of equipment. 1 leaf, folded.
- 20 Manuscript: Instructions for manufacturing cream of tartar, c. 1865
- Handwritten instructions for manufacturing cream of tartar. Descriptions of brewing tubs, length of time for various steps, etc. Probably from correspondent in France to Vignes family. 1 leaf.
- 21 Manuscript: Instructions for preparing brew, 1862
- Three-step instructions belonging to Vignes family preparing brew, using brandy, wine, prunes, etc. Mathematical calculations on verso in pencil. 1 leaf.
- 22 Manuscript: Instructions for using “tartre” in making wine, 19th century [fragment]
- Instructions belonging to the Vignes family for using tartar in making wine. Torn from a larger sheet. 1 leaf.
- 23 Manuscript: Notes on production of cream of tartar, 1864-1865
- Handwritten notes in pencil on production of cream of tartar. 1 leaf.
- 24 Recipe: Cream of tartar
- Handwritten instructions for making cream of tartar.

- 1 leaf.
- 25 Recipe: Malt from barley, 19th century
- Recipe belonging to Vignes family titled “160 pounds of barley makes 145 pounds of malts.” 1 leaf.
- 26 Recipe: Notes, 1897.
- Pencil notes, Vignes family member, of recipes dated October 1897. On verso is a handbill concerning a convocation of local Frenchmen dated June 28, 1893.
- 27 Recipe: Pearl Ash (“Cendres Gravellees”), 19th century
- Handwritten instructions for preparing pearl ash (cendres gravellees) manufactured by Vital Vignes. 1 leaf.
- 28 Recipes: 5/12/1866
- Recipes, belonging to Vignes family. Verso, list of 20 names. Torn from notebook. 1 leaf.
- 29 Notebook, “Crème de Tartre” on cover, 19th century [recipes & costs of drugs]
- Notebook. “Crème de Tartre” written on cover. Contains information on cost of drugs, French-English words, recipes for drinks. Belonged to Vignes family. 21 pages with writing. 2-cent U.S. stamp inside.
- 30 Diary—Pierre Vignes, 1843-1848
- 31 Diary—Pierre Vignes, 1843-1848—
Transcription and translation
- 1ov Tract Map and Notice of Sale of Vignes Tract, 1886
- Map and Auction notice for the “Vignes Tract, 87 Elegant Lots in East Los Angeles, Cal.” Land to be sold Oct. 30, 1886 by Los Angeles Land Bureau. [The map/broadside was removed from its frame, deacidified, repaired with Japanese tissue, and encapsulated in mylar.]