
Images of History:

THE MOSK FAMILY AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION

BY MARTHA NOBLE*

NEWS OF ASSOCIATE JUSTICE RICHARD M. MOSK'S retirement from the California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District in March of 2016 was followed, all too quickly, by the sad news of his passing at the age of 76.¹ The son of California Supreme Court Justice Stanley Mosk, the state's longest-serving Supreme Court justice, Richard Mosk shared his father's commitment to public service and his passion for politics and the law.² Both men also shared a keen interest in acquiring and preserving the autographs of influential figures in American history. In 2001, when the papers of Justice Stanley Mosk were transferred to the California Judicial Center Library, Richard Mosk retained the family's prized autograph collection and continued to care for and enrich it after his father's death.

The gift of the Stanley Mosk Papers, described in detail in an earlier article,³ spurred the development of Special Collections & Archives as a repository at the California Judicial Center Library and marked the beginning of collaborative efforts to describe, preserve, and provide access to this remarkable collection of papers documenting Stanley Mosk's unparalleled life of public service. As Special Collections & Archives staff discovered valuable original autographs within the Stanley Mosk Papers, preservation copies were made and original letters and documents were returned to Richard Mosk. Richard Mosk, in turn, provided the library with an index of the autograph collection and arranged to have materials that might be of interest to researchers scanned and delivered to Special Collections & Archives.

In June of 2016, just two months after Richard Mosk's passing, library staff learned that plans had been made to donate the Mosk family autograph collection and autographed books collection to the California Judicial Center Library where they would join the Stanley Mosk Papers in Special Collections & Archives. Under the guidance of Supreme Court Clerk/Administrator Jorge Navarrete, serving as the library's acting director, insurance was obtained for the collections and arrangements were made for their transfer from the Mosk residence in Southern California to the library in San Francisco. After the donation was formalized, Sandra Mosk, Richard Mosk's wife, graciously shared

some of her memories regarding her husband's emotional investment in the collections. Sandra Mosk's recollections appear below:

In 2001, not long after the death of his father Stanley Mosk, Richard Mosk had to determine the most efficient way to transport his beloved autograph collection from his father's San Francisco home to his own home in Los Angeles. He and his father initiated the collection together when Richard was a young boy. Looking back on it now, I am certain that Stanley had some ulterior motives for embarking on such a challenging undertaking with his son. Stanley hoped that the collecting of autographs of former presidents, vice-presidents, and Supreme Court members would not only offer a rich education in American history and government, topics about which he could become passionate, but also might inspire him to pursue a career in a related profession one day. Finally, and most significantly, their collaboration would provide cherished time together, father and son.

Richard was determined to be present during the movement of the collection from one city to the other. He and his father had committed so much time and energy to the collection that its value was priceless. Therefore, he enlisted the assistance of a close friend who owned and piloted a small plane. Together the two men flew to San Francisco to secure their prize, pack it in boxes, and load it onto the plane. What Richard wasn't prepared for was the task of weighing each carton before loading it onto the plane, then placing the boxes in such a way that the plane was exactly balanced. Of course, they also had to allow for their own body weights. It was an enormous task that took most of the day to complete. Early that evening I met the plane at the Santa Monica Airport. The boxes were carefully unloaded after arriving safely in Los Angeles. Mission accomplished!

Now housed in a secured area in Special Collections & Archives, the autograph collection and autographed books collection contain more than 3,000 autographs. Correspondence, documents, books and photographs within the collections represent both the sophisticated collecting interests of Stanley Mosk and his son as well as the intriguing range of personal friendships, political connections, and professional relationships developed by Richard and Stanley Mosk. The collections also include correspondence and inscriptions addressed to other members of the Mosk family. Richard Mosk's mother, Edna Mosk, and Stanley Mosk's brother, Edward Mosk, each appear to have had a hand in acquiring a portion of the collection's content.

Jacqueline Braitman and Gerald Uelmen give some attention to the early collecting activities of Stanley

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Mosk in their recent biography, *Justice Stanley Mosk: A Life at the Center of California Politics and Justice*. Known as “Morey” in his youth, Stanley Mosk and his brother Edward reportedly wrote to elected officials, Supreme Court justices and other notable figures with the goal of adding to their collection of autographed envelopes of “first day covers” with newly issued postage stamps.⁴ Bearing dates as early as 1924, when Stanley Mosk would have been just 12 years old, these responses from elected officials are found throughout the collection.

A small card signed by Calvin Coolidge, the 30th president, and a concise letter to Morey Stanley Mosk from the honorable Hiram Johnson, U.S. senator and former California governor, are among the autographs that date from this period. These early treasures would later be joined by the autographs of another 44 U.S. presidents (many of which both Stanley and Richard appear to have purchased to complete the set of U.S. presidents),⁵ over 100 Supreme Court justices, authors, actors, prominent public officials, sports stars, and a host of other well-known figures.

Following Mosk’s appointment to the staff of California Gov. Culbert L. Olson in 1939, correspondence received by Mosk in relation to his professional activities begins to appear in the autograph collection. Signed

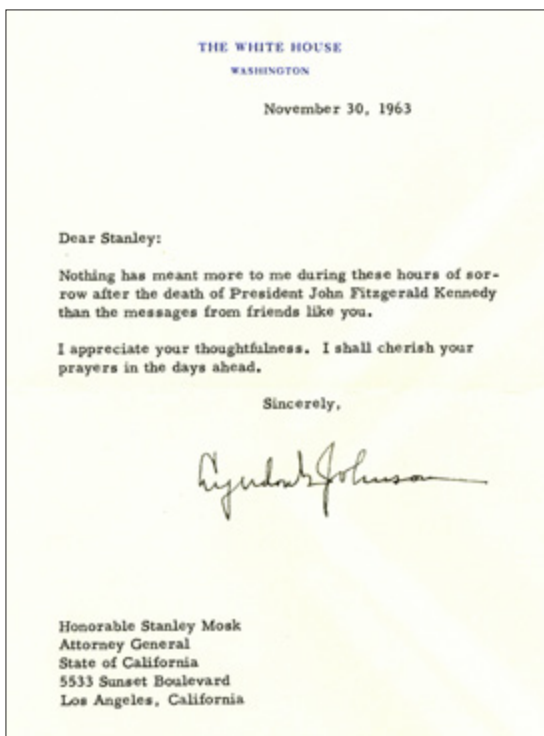
correspondence to Mosk from Earl Warren, California’s 30th governor, first appears in the collection in the 1940s. Over time, letters from Warren, by then the 14th chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, take on a warmth that speaks to the friendship that eventually developed between the two men.

Letters received by Mosk, then California’s attorney general, from Senator John F. Kennedy in the late 1950s also exhibit a congenial tone that suggests a friendship existed between Kennedy and Mosk prior to the 1960 presidential campaign. During that campaign, Stanley Mosk served as California’s Democratic Party National Committeeman and accompanied John F. Kennedy on his speaking tours throughout the state. President Lyndon B. Johnson’s letters to Stanley Mosk in 1963 provide a stark contrast between the last months of Johnson’s service as vice president and the days immediately following Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963.

Under the leadership of the library’s new director, Donna Williams, Special Collections & Archives staff continue the work of indexing, assessing, and rehousing collection materials to ensure that they are fully accessible and preserved for the benefit of future generations. The generosity and foresight of the late Justice Richard Mosk is remembered with much gratitude. ★

ENDNOTES

1. “Courts Mourn the Passing of Justice Richard Mosk” *California Courts Newsroom*, April 18, 2016, <http://newsroom.courts.ca.gov/news/courts-mourn-the-passing-of-justice-richard-mosk>.
2. Jacqueline R. Braitman and Gerald F. Uelmen, “The Longest-Serving Justice: Highlights from a New Biography of Justice Stanley Mosk,” *CSCHS Newsletter*, Spring/Summer 2014, 2–14, <https://www.cschs.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2014-Spring-Stanley-Mosk-Biography.pdf>.
3. Frances M. Jones, “The Stanley Mosk Papers,” *CSCHS Newsletter*, Fall/Winter 2008, 8–11, <https://www.cschs.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2008-Newsletter-Fall-Stanley-Mosk-Papers.pdf>.
4. Jacqueline R. Braitman and Gerald F. Uelmen, *Justice Stanley Mosk: A Life at the Center of California Politics and Justice*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012, 18–19.
5. An autograph of President Polk was almost certainly purchased from a dealer. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama are both represented in the collection, with Obama’s autograph appearing on a letter to Richard Mosk.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: An autographed photo of U.S. Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer; a 1963 letter of thanks from President Lyndon B. Johnson to Stanley Mosk; and an autographed photo of President William Taft.

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