

CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY

CALIFORNIA HISTORY SECTION

RESEARCH GUIDES

MODESTO HISTORY



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California History Section

900 N Street Room 200

9:30-4 Monday-Friday

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Founded in 1870 as a railroad town, Modesto derives its name from William C. Ralston, a prominent San Francisco banker, who refused to name the town Ralston. Now celebrating its 150th anniversary since its founding, this city not only features any number of historic sites, from the McHenry Mansion to the Modesto arch, it also served as the inspiration for the movie American Graffiti and is home to the E. & J. Gallo Winery. Not surprisingly, given its historic nature, it is also home to a number of active historical and genealogical societies. If you are looking for exciting local information resources in the [California History Section's](#) rich collections, then check out what we have for this city!

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ENJOY YOUR RESEARCH!

DIGITIZED RESOURCES

Can't come to the library just yet? No worries! There are a number of online resources you can explore related to Modesto!



[Digitized Publications](#)

A few years ago we digitized some of our more fragile publications. You can now see documents related to Modesto on Internet Archive!



URL: <https://archive.org/>

Type in Search Box: (Modesto) AND collection:(californiastatelibrary)

Select Option: "Search Full Text of Books"



[Digitized Images](#)

We have scanned and digitized a portion of our extensive photograph collection, including images related to Modesto. You can see them on Calisphere!



URL: <https://calisphere.org/institution/51/items/>

Type in Search Box: ("Modesto")

GENERAL RESEARCH TIPS

While many of our materials are online, even more are only in hard-copy. You can use the following resources to learn about our Modesto resources.



Catalog

If you are looking for Modesto materials your best source is our [catalog](#). You can do a general search on the catalog but also be sure to check out our specialized resources on page 7 of this research guide!



URL: [https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?](https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&lang=en&sortby=rank)
[vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&lang=en&sortby=rank](https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&lang=en&sortby=rank)

Type in Subject Box: (Modesto)



California Information File II

Sometimes the catalog doesn't provide as much detail as you might like. This is why we created the California Information File II, successor to the analog California Information File I. In this resource, you can find indexing to individual articles, as well as Modesto deeds, restaurant menus, pamphlets and more!



URL: http://dbs.library.ca.gov/dbtext_html/QueryCalinfo.htm

Type in Search Box:

1. Modesto
-

GENERAL RESEARCH TIPS



City Directories

Looking for a person? How about the history of a location? You can trace this information and more via our city directories! See what we have by checking our specialized database.



URL: http://dbs.library.ca.gov/dbtext_html/QueryCityDir.htm

Type in Search Box:

1. Modesto



Telephone Books

Are you not finding what you need in our city directory collection? No worries, you might find it in our telephone book collection. See what we have by checking our phone book database.



URL: http://dbs.library.ca.gov/dbtext_html/QueryPhonebk.htm

Type in Search Box:

1. Modesto

SPECIFIC RESOURCES IN OUR CATALOG

Modesto has a long and distinguished history! Check out our resources by type and by subject to learn more about this city's complex past!

Type

[Maps](#)

[Books](#)

[County Histories](#)

[Images](#)

[Manuscripts](#)

[Newspapers](#)

[Periodicals](#)

[Vital Statistics](#)



Subjects

[Agriculture](#)

[Art](#)

[Baseball](#)

[Business](#)

[Education](#)

[Environment](#)

[Fire](#)

[Land](#)

[Medicine](#)

[Migration](#)

[Native Americans](#)

[Oil](#)

[Politics](#)

[Railroads](#)

[Religion](#)

[Streets](#)

[Water](#)

[Wildlife](#)

[Women](#)

ON-SITE RESEARCH RESOURCES

Our collection predates computers and so do some of our access points! If you are in the library, be sure to check the following analog files for leads on more resources.



California Information File

In the library? Check the California Information File before you do anything else! This file indexes over 130 years of California articles, books, and manuscript collections from a variety of counties.



Subject Headings: Counties: Stanislaus:
Modesto



Map File

Looking for a Modesto map? Our map file is a great place to start. We have a wide variety of maps, including Sanborn fire insurance maps. Some of our maps cover settlement patterns and even natural history.



Subject Headings: Stanislaus County



Photographic File

Sometimes a picture is worth a 1000 words and not all of our pictures are online. To check the rest of the collection search our picture file card catalog.



Subject Headings: Counties: Stanislaus:
Modesto

OTHER ON-SITE RESOURCES

Despite our best efforts, some of our resources defy complete description. We suggest that you ask a librarian about Modesto information contained in the following resources.



Vertical Files

Our massive collection of vertical files covers a wide variety of topics including individual cities. You can check them for pamphlets, certificates and even posters related to organizations, individuals, and area histories.



Subject Headings: Counties: Stanislaus:
Modesto



Postcard Files

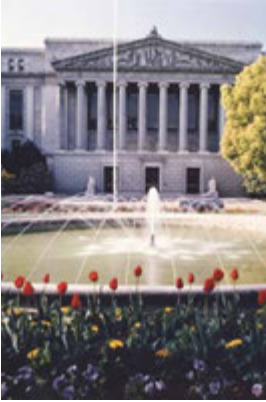
Separate from our photo collection, our postcard collection contains a number of images related to Modesto. Most are not online.



Subject Headings: Counties: Stanislaus:
Modesto

OTHER PLACES TO LOOK

Of course, the California History Section doesn't have everything, so we suggest that in addition to looking at our collections, you contact the following organizations



Other California State Library Sections

[Government Publications Section](#)

[Witkin Law Library](#)

[Sutro Library](#)

[General Information](#)



URLs:

- <http://www.library.ca.gov/government-publications/>
 - <http://www.library.ca.gov/law/>
 - <http://www.library.ca.gov/sutro/>
 - <https://www.library.ca.gov/services>
-



Other Organizations

[McHenry Museum and Historical Society](#)

[County Clerk-Recorder](#)

[Stanislaus County Library](#)

[Modesto 150](#)



URLs:

- <https://www.mchenrymuseum.org/>
 - <http://www.stancounty.com/clerkrecorder/>
 - <http://www.stanislauslibrary.org/>
 - <https://www.modesto150.com/>
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Hours: 9:30-4 Monday-Friday

This guide is also available online at:
<http://www.library.ca.gov/california-history/research-guides/>