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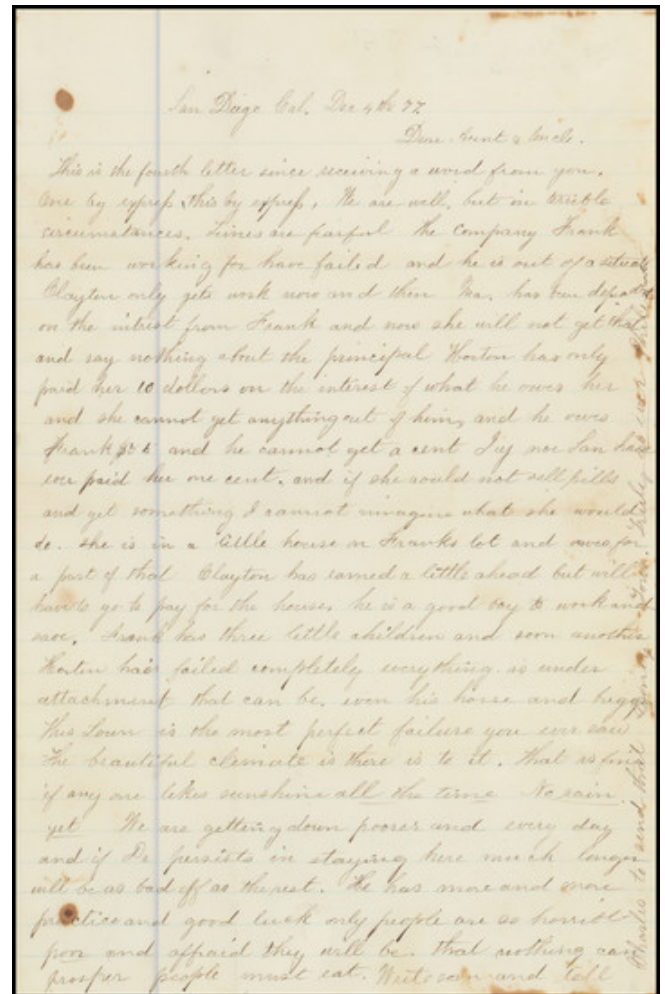
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(San Diego) [Manuscript letter by a young woman concerning Alonso Horton and Economic Conditions in San Diego, dated Dec. 4, 1877]

Stock#: 97845
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1877
Place: San Diego
Color: Pen & Ink
Condition: VG
Size: 8 x 12 inches
Price: \$ 1,400.00



Description:

Downwardly Mobile in San Diego in 1877:

"This town is the most perfect failure you ever saw. The beautiful climate is [all] there is to it."

A fascinating and very early letter written from San Diego, which mentions Alonso Horton, the city's founding father, in a rather negative light. The writer, who signs herself Philene, writes to an aunt and uncle concerning the depressed economic conditions in San Diego and the grim reality of failed businesses, financial struggles, and mounting debts within her family.

Drawer Ref: Southern
California

Stock#: 97845



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According to the letter the writer's mother was owed interest payments from none other than Horton, "who has only paid her 10 dollars on the interest of what he owes her and she cannot get anything out of him." Philene's mother apparently survived on what she made by selling "pills" - perhaps a patent medicine. The letter includes an intriguing reference to a "Dr." who seems to have been a relative or an associate of the writer: "if Dr. persists in staying here much longer will be as bad off as the rest." San Diego's arid climate was already attracting health-seekers suffering from tuberculosis and other respiratory ailments. Perhaps the "Dr." came to San Diego to market his medical services and medicines.

San Diego bankrupt. Horton busted. Property nearly worthless.

Alonso E. Horton, a San Francisco furniture dealer, arrived in San Diego in 1867 and knew something about publicity and marketing. The original town was located near the San Diego River in present day Old Town, miles from the waterfront. Horton managed to buy 900 acres of undeveloped land fronting San Diego Bay at 26 cents per acre and set to work creating a new San Diego near the fabulous natural harbor. However, the collapse of the Texas and Pacific Railroad and a nation-wide panic led to a bust in San Diego real estate:

*The city developed slowly at first. Returns for 1867 were a mere \$3000, and Horton was obliged to offer inducements to purchasers... In 1869 he built a 700-foot wharf and sold blocks at prices varying from \$2000 to \$6000... The Memphis, El Paso, and Pacific Railroad flurry aided Horton's advertising, and by 1870 San Diego had 800 buildings and a population of 3000... the failure of the Texas and Pacific scheme dealt a heavy blow to San Diego's prospects and in "1875 the population had dwindled down to about 1500, and these were living largely on faith, hope, and climate." - Dumke, *The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California*, page 137.*

The city didn't recover economically until the 1880s, when it experienced another real estate boom fueled by speculation.

Here follows the text of the letter:

Dear Aunt & Uncle,

This is the fourth letter since receiving a word from you. One by express, this by express. We are well, but in terrible circumstances. Times are fearful. The company Frank has been working for have failed and he is out of a situation. Clayton only gets work now and then. Ma has been dependent on the interest from Frank and now she will not get that and say nothing about the principal Horton has only paid her 10 dollars on the interest of what he owes her and she cannot get anything out of him,



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and he owes Frank \$55 and he cannot get a cent [Jay?] nor [San?] have ever paid her one cent, and if she could not sell pills and get something I cannot imagine what she would do. She is in a little house on Frank's lot and owes for a part of that. Clayton has earned a little ahead but will have to go to pay for the house, he is a good boy to work and save. Frank has three little children and soon another. Horton has failed completely, everything is under attachment that can be, even his horse and buggy. This town is the most perfect failure you ever saw. The beautiful climate is [all] there is to it. That is fine if any one likes sunshine all the time. No rain yet. We are getting down poorer every day and if Dr persists in staying here much longer will be as bad off as the rest. He has more and more practice and good luck only people are so horrible poor and affraid they will be, that nothing can prosper, people must eat. Write soon and tell Charles to send that money. Yours truly as ever, Philene

Rarity

Original letters dating from 1870s San Diego are rare in the market, particularly letters with candid appraisals of the local situation mentioning a key figure such as Horton.

Detailed Condition:

Letter sheet (lined) with 1 full page of neat manuscript text. Verso blank. Fold marks. A few fox marks. Overall clean and nice.