A spirited Pacifican who became...
The words of George R. Moscone ’53—in his personal letters, political correspondence, draft speeches—speak of change and equality.

In these papers are the ambitions and dreams and even the fears of a pioneering public servant best remembered as a state senator and San Francisco mayor who spurred landmark legislation and fought for the inclusion of women and minorities.

For more than 35 years after his assassination in 1978, however, Moscone’s legacy went largely unexamined.

His papers—a wealth of materials that give a firsthand account of one of the most transformational eras in California politics—had spent decades tucked away in a San Francisco storage facility.

Filling more than 90 boxes, the collection was recently unearthed by his family, who decided to donate this historical treasure trove to University of the Pacific.

Today it has a new home and purpose at his alma mater.

Pacific will proudly house Moscone’s papers, together with a vast compilation of video interviews, in the Holt-Atherton Special Collections on the Stockton Campus, where it will join collections such as the Brubeck Collection and the John Muir Papers. Once it is catalogued, the Moscone Collection will be open to scholars and the general public, and his legacy will be preserved for generations to come.

Raised by a single working mother in San Francisco’s Marina district, Moscone was the first in his Italian-American family to go to college. After graduating from St. Ignatius, a private Catholic high school, he attended the University of San Francisco, the city’s private Catholic university. He left after one semester and enlisted in the Navy. When his tour was over, he tried Santa Rosa Junior College for a semester. Then friends suggested he take a look at Pacific, and the rest is history.

“I loved San Francisco but knew that to grow as a person I would have to leave and see a different part of life,” then-San Francisco Mayor Moscone said in a 1977 interview with the Pacific Review.

“I had several friends who spoke highly of Pacific, and visiting the campus, I was impressed by the beauty, the people and the general atmosphere,” he remembered. “The school was small enough to eliminate my fears of becoming just a number at a large university.”

Pacific had 1,037 students when George Moscone transferred to then-College of the Pacific in 1950 on a basketball scholarship. He hit the ground running, and not just on the court.

His fraternity brothers elected him president of the Rho Lambda Phi fraternity. He was a member of the student senate. As a commissioner of the campus’s Rally Committee, he helped spark Pacific spirit at football games. The group’s stated goal was “not only to spur the team to victory but also to promote the interest of COP’s many supporters.”

A point guard for the Tigers, Moscone was described in the basketball press guide: “The floor leader of the team, George has a nice long shot and is the team boss, directing all of the plays,” according to the Pacific Review article.

Chairman of the California Democratic Party John L. Burton, who met Moscone in high school and played basketball for then-San Francisco State College at the same time Moscone played for the Tigers, remembered his friend as a fiery competitor who angered Burton’s coach during one game.

George R. Moscone

a pathbreaking public servant

Moscone, the spirited Pacifican
“Everybody who knew him recognized him as a person of considerable ability”

“Opponents could get mad at George. He had a temper. So the San Francisco State coach comes in at halftime, screaming about ‘Moscone this, Moscone that,’ and I said, ‘Well, jeez, he’s scoring a lot of points against us.’ And the coach says, ‘Yeah, but he’s out there hot-dogging it,’” said Burton, smiling at the memory.

In the 1977 interview for the Pacific Review, Moscone reflected on his Pacific years.

“It was an unusual time to be on campus in many respects,” Moscone said. “There was the interaction between the veterans and younger students, the fact that it was a coed campus and I was coming out of the Navy after going to an all-boys high school, plus I was from a very urban area and many of the students I met were not.”

“Everybody who knew him recognized him as a person of considerable ability,” recalled the late Harold Jacoby, one of Moscone’s Pacific professors, in the Pacific Review story. “He was an able student and very affable person.”

After graduating in 1953 with a degree in sociology, Moscone entered UC Hastings School of the Law, where he met Willie L. Brown Jr., who went on to become speaker of the California Assembly and mayor of San Francisco. Moscone earned his law degree in 1956. In later years, Pacific awarded him an honorary Doctor of Laws in 1976, and he was inducted posthumously into the 1986-87 Pacific Athletics Hall of Fame.

A Tribute to George R. Moscone

At Pacific’s San Francisco Campus on March 26, the University and Moscone’s family celebrated the legacy and contributions he made to California, San Francisco and his University.

The event included a panel discussion moderated by California State Librarian Greg Lucas. The discussion, at times thoughtful and emotional and at other times uproarious, delivered poignant vignettes of Moscone’s life. It featured four people who knew him well:

- **Willie L. Brown Jr.**, former speaker of the California Assembly and former mayor of San Francisco
- **John L. Burton**, chairman of the California Democratic Party and a former California assemblyman and U.S. congressman
- **Belva Davis**, journalist and longtime host of “This Week in Northern California” on KQED, San Francisco’s PBS affiliate
- **Jonathan Moscone**, artistic director for the California Shakespeare Theater and son of the late mayor


The tribute was made possible by AT&T California and alumni including Pacific Regent Virginia Chan ’77; her daughter, Megan Chan ’13; and former Regent Connie Callahan. Corporate sponsors included Kaiser Permanente, JP Morgan Chase & Co., Dignity Health, PG&E and Eventbrite.
Moscone, the Pathbreaking Public Servant

After law school, Moscone went into private practice. But he soon jumped into the public arena, where he would make his enduring mark.

Burton’s late brother, Phillip, who at the time was a State Assembly member, recruited Moscone to enter politics.

“Phillip convinced George to run for Assembly. Nobody thought he would win, and he didn’t. Then in 1963 he decided to run for supervisor. It was the most exciting campaign, the most fun campaign I ever had in my life, and the happiest I ever was when he won,” Burton said.

Moscone promptly established himself as a voice for marginalized constituencies, including low-income San Franciscans, minorities and small-business owners. And Brown gave an example of how Moscone’s principles stood firm when the stakes were high, recalling when he went to Mississippi in 1965 to help in the effort there to bring the rule of law to the electoral process.

“There were many people who did the work, the grunt work, of providing the evidence that was needed of African Americans who wanted to vote, but couldn’t vote,” said Brown. “A call went out across the nation for lawyers to go down to Mississippi to collect this data and risk their lives in pursuit thereof.”

Brown drove Moscone to the airport to do exactly that. “And you never, ever, heard George talk about that experience as some kind of thing he should’ve been acknowledged for.”

In 1966, Moscone won a seat in the California State Senate. By this time a rising star in California Democratic circles, Moscone was quickly elected majority leader, where he proved himself a wily and thoughtful policymaker.

For Brown, a key example of Moscone’s leadership came when he secured the 1975 passage of a Brown-authored bill to decriminalize sodomy—a milestone in the California gay rights movement.

Brown had engineered the bill’s approval in the Assembly, but Moscone had told him that in the Senate, which was evenly split between Democrats and Republicans at 20 members each, Moscone could deliver only the 20 Democratic votes.

But Moscone developed a plan: he would call for a vote on the bill, get a 20-20 tie and then have Democratic Lt. Gov. Mervyn Dymally break the tie. Moscone kept the legislators on the Senate floor for nine or 10 hours until Dymally could return from a trip to Colorado and cast the deciding vote, Brown recalled.

At that time, there was no recognizable gay or lesbian vote, or politically powerful constituency, Brown said—“But there was George Moscone.”

Moscone, the Mayor

Moscone became mayor in the mid-70s, on the cusp of great political change in San Francisco.

“New groups, like Latinos and gays, were increasingly a part of San Francisco, and they were often focused on the needs and concerns of their neighborhoods, not downtown development. This created tensions between the new and the old. George Moscone brought these new voices into City Hall,” said U.S. Rep. Jackie Speier.

This coalition flowered after Moscone’s 1975 election victory in the San Francisco mayor’s race, when he squeaked into office by 5,000 votes. He appointed unprecedented numbers of women, gays and ethnic minorities to city boards and commissions.

Belva Davis, a pioneering African American journalist, first met Moscone when she was working for an African American newspaper, and was impressed with what she saw.

“George came along talking about people in need, people who needed a break. I was a single mom with two children, and I was working three jobs,” said Davis. “There were times when he was talking about equality and he’d look at me and there’d just be a connection. He was saying all the things that I had hoped to hear from white politicians, and I became a great admirer.”

Through this often-divisive time in San Francisco politics, however, Moscone sought to work with both downtown business interests as well as the constituencies who helped put him into office, citing the Moscone Convention Center development and his successful effort to keep the San Francisco Giants from relocating to Toronto among his proudest accomplishments.

Yet Moscone did not let bridge building between potentially hostile constituencies interfere with his sense of humor, Brown remembers.

“George calls me up on a Saturday morning and says, ‘You’re coming with me, to North Beach. We’re going to eat lunch with the Italian chefs. They have a monthly luncheon.’ It was all Italians, they only speak Italian, it’s only Italians that are invited, and George says, ‘Today you’re going to be an Italian—Brownini, Guglielmo Brownini. Whatever you do, don’t say a word, because you don’t speak Italian. Let me handle it.’”

Those Italian chefs would eventually become a group of North Beach political supporters.

To solidify the political power of diverse neighborhood constituencies, Moscone gave his strong support to an initiative that established district elections for supervisors. The ordinance resulted in the election of Harvey Milk, the city’s first openly gay supervisor; Gordon Lau, the city’s first Asian supervisor; and Dan White, a city firefighter who represented the city’s southernmost neighborhoods.

In November 1978, White would assassinate Milk and Moscone, who had just turned 49.
Eighteen months ago, Moscone’s papers re-emerged from a storage facility that had been rented decades earlier by a family member. The boxes were then stored at the old Mint Building in San Francisco until February, when this gold mine of California history was moved to Pacific’s Holt-Atherton Special Collections.

In addition to Moscone’s papers, the Moscone Collection includes video archives and digital photos from an upcoming documentary on his life, produced by the George R. Moscone Center for Public Service.

Moscone’s family had considered proposals from other entities that wanted to archive his papers, but they ultimately chose Pacific and its Special Collections department.

“My dad loved Pacific. He would be pleased that his papers are going to his alma mater,” said his son Chris Moscone, a founding partner at the Moscone Emblidge & Otis law firm in San Francisco.

Michael Wurtz, Pacific’s head of special collections, said the Moscone Collection will provide valuable insight and nuance to the tumultuous political era in which Moscone thrived.

“The Collection documents an era of great change in San Francisco and California politics,” said Wurtz. “We are anxious to make it available for researchers so they can discover the stories and build on Moscone’s legacy.”

Early finds from the Collection provide evidence of Moscone’s eloquence and commitment to social justice.

“I believe that we need not accept the inevitability of ugliness and evil,” Moscone wrote in one 1971 speech. “I believe that we can give life to a new spirit; a spirit of love, understanding, peace, and the worth of human dignity.”

The University, along with Moscone’s family and the Moscone Center, hosted a gala tribute in March at Pacific’s San Francisco campus to formally acknowledge the donation of the Moscone Collection to the University.

“George Moscone was a gifted public servant and a leader who was ahead of his time, especially in advocating for the rights of the LGBT community and other minorities,” said U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, honorary event chair, in a video tribute played at the gala.

“I am delighted to join with University of the Pacific and many others to honor George and his contributions to San Francisco and California,” she said.

In addition to Senator Feinstein, U.S. Rep. Jackie Speier also delivered a video tribute in which she lauded Moscone for his work in galvanizing a political coalition of previously excluded groups—including women, racial minorities, gays, labor and low-income communities—that remains a powerhouse in Bay Area politics and serves as a model for other efforts nationwide.

“We are celebrating a visionary. Today, San Francisco is viewed, justifiably, as the progressive capital of the nation. The roots of this proud heritage are many, but at least one major reason is because George Moscone led the city during his time,” Speier said.

“Today, being bold is the norm in our city. Back then, it took guts and vision. George Moscone had both. And we are so proud to honor this great leader who laid the foundation. San Francisco today really is a reflection of George Moscone’s hopes for us all.”
Moscone, the Scholarship —

Pacific alumni and friends stepped forward to establish the George R. Moscone Endowed Scholarship with an endowment that has exceeded $50,000. Their gifts will be matched by the University’s Powell Fund, bringing the total endowment to more than $100,000. Future gifts to the scholarship are also eligible for Powell matching funds.

Annual distributions from the endowment will fund yearly scholarships in perpetuity, helping make a Pacific education possible for generations of students. The scholarship will be reserved for students who demonstrate an interest in the values Moscone embodied: civic leadership, social justice, human rights, equality and diversity.

“Pacific’s commitment to diversity and inclusion is why I wanted to contribute to this scholarship,” said lead donor Eric Dingler ’87, a Deloitte director in Los Angeles. “As recent events remind us, changing hearts and minds takes time, effort and attention. I hope this brings more attention to diversity and inclusion.”

President Pamela Eibeck said that the scholarship will help ensure Moscone’s legacy is remembered and honored.

“We are grateful for the outpouring of support for the George R. Moscone Endowed Scholarship,” she said. “Through the scholarship and as the steward of his papers, Pacific is proud to share and celebrate Moscone’s profound commitment to justice, fairness, inclusion and equality.

Moscone, the Person ———

During the tribute’s panel discussion, Jonathan Moscone recalled his father as a loving parent and a role model.

“He’d let us stay up and watch the ‘Odd Couple’ with him. He loved to sit back and slouch and hang out with his family. I loved that about him,” said Moscone’s son Jonathan.

“And like with basketball, [he ensured that] whoever you were, whatever the geography, whatever your class, you were playing on the same field, and you won or lost based on what you did. And it was based on your own talent and your teamwork,” he said.

In a poignant moment, Jonathan Moscone recalled when he first started to look over his father’s papers, after they had been rediscovered, and came upon his father’s notes from the 1965 plane flight to Mississippi during the civil rights movement.

“When I opened the boxes, I pulled out a notepad in my dad’s handwriting—he had beautiful handwriting—and it said, ‘Just got on the plane to Mississippi … I’m scared out of my mind. Maybe Gina [Moscone’s wife] was right.’”

“He wasn’t fearless. He was human, he was fearful—just like the rest of us—but he fought through it,” the son reflected. “Just to read that ...”

Moscone, Political Legacy

In the California Legislature:

★ Wrote legislation that instituted a statewide school lunch program
★ Supported a right to privacy ballot initiative, which presaged the era of big data
★ Wrote legislation mandating bilingual education in public schools
★ Helped reduce penalties for possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use
★ With Willie Brown Jr.’s help in the Assembly, won passage of a bill repealing the state’s sodomy law

As San Francisco Mayor:

★ Appointed record numbers of women and minorities to offices, commissions and boards, among them San Francisco’s first African American county sheriff, Eugene A. Brown
★ Gave strong support to a 1977 city ballot initiative that created district elections of the Board of Supervisors. This opened the door for the election of the nation’s first openly gay male elected public official, Harvey Milk; the city’s first Chinese American supervisor, Gordon Lau; and other representatives of previously marginalized groups
★ Brokered a deal to develop the Moscone Center convention facility, which was named in his honor after his assassination
★ Worked successfully in 1976 to keep the San Francisco Giants from moving to Toronto

Currently being catalogued, the Moscone Collection is expected to be available for research beginning in 2016. A vast collection of video interviews recorded for a forthcoming documentary of his life will also be available.

Find out more about Moscone’s legacy: go.Pacific.edu/Moscone.