

Ralph I. Gifford Motion Pictures, circa 1925-1940

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Gifford, Ralph I.
Title	Ralph I. Gifford Motion Pictures
Dates	circa 1925-1940 (inclusive) 1920 1945
Quantity	0.5 cubic foot, including 8 film reels, (1 box and 1 film can)
Collection Number	P 218-SG 3
Summary	The Ralph I. Gifford Motion Pictures consist of <i>The New Oregon Trail</i> , a tourism film photographed by Ralph I. Gifford for the Oregon State Highway Department, and unedited motion film clips of a variety of subjects, including alpine search and rescue. Ralph I. Gifford became the first photographer of the Travel and Information Department of the Oregon State Highway Commission in 1936, a position he held until his death in 1947.
Repository	Oregon State University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives Research Center Special Collections and Archives Research Center 121 The Valley Library Oregon State University Corvallis OR 97331-4501 Telephone: 541-737-2075 Fax: 541-737-8674 scarc@oregonstate.edu
Access Restrictions	Collection is open for research.
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Biographical Note

Born in Portland, Oregon, Ralph I. Gifford (1894-1947) worked in his father Benjamin A. Gifford's photography studio as a boy and accompanied his father on photography trips around Oregon. Ralph married Wanda Muir Theobald in 1918 and spent the last part of World War I in the U.S. Navy. He was stationed at a naval base on Whiddy Island, Ireland, during part of his time in the Navy. Ralph took over his father's photography business around 1920 and sold it in 1928 to go into the motion picture business with F. C. Heaton in Portland.

In 1936, Ralph became the first photographer of the newly established Travel and Information Department of the Oregon State Highway Commission. His landscape views of Oregon's natural beauty were used for many years to promote tourism in the state. He also took motion pictures for the Highway Commission, including the color version of *The New Oregon Trail*, which was shown in every state in

the U.S., and *Glimpses From Oregon State Parks*, released shortly before Ralph's death on June 23, 1947. His obituary, published in several Oregon newspapers in late June 1947, stated that "more than any other person, he is responsible for the tourist business in Oregon being an \$83,500,000 business."

Ralph also took and sold photographs commercially; many of his commercial views were taken at the same time as his Highway Commission photos. His photographs could be purchased as postcards, view sets, individual prints, and photo-plaques. In a letter to the managing editor of *U.S. Camera* magazine, Ralph stated in 1943 that his work was "to visually educate the traveling public as to Oregon's scenic and vacation possibilities."

Harold B. Say was the first director of the Travel Information Division of the Oregon State Highway Department, serving in that capacity from 1935 to 1946.

Content Description

The Ralph I Gifford Motion Picture Films consist of *The New Oregon Trail* and unedited motion film clips of a variety of subjects.

The New Oregon Trail is a tourism promotion film presented by the Oregon State Highway Department. The production was supervised and edited by Harold Bradley Say, photographed by Ralph I. Gifford, and distributed by Castle Films. The 16 mm Kodachrome color film, with soundtrack, is approximately 22 minutes long (800 feet). A digital duplication master and DVD use copy are available. The film is also available for viewing [online](#).

The New Oregon Trail consists of footage of scenic and recreational attractions in Oregon. It includes: Willowa Lake and the Willowa Mountains; Celilo Falls, Multnomah Falls, the Columbia River Highway, Columbia River Gorge, and Bonneville Dam; Portland street scenes, waterfront, and Rose Festival activities; the Oregon Coast, Astoria Regatta, Seaside, sea lions, and lighthouses; the Oregon Caves and Crater Lake; the Rogue, Umpqua, McKenzie, and Metolius Rivers and numerous mountain lakes; the Crooked River Gorge and Fossil Beds in central Oregon; a geyser near Lakeview; birds at Malheur Lake; guests at dude ranches; and skiing in the Blue Mountains and on Mount Hood. Scenes of Astoria, Bend, and Salem are also included. The film strongly promotes sport and commercial fishing on the Oregon Coast and in Oregon rivers, streams, and lakes. Of special note are scenes of Native Americans fishing at Celilo Falls; state parks throughout Oregon; highways and bridges, especially on the Oregon Coast; Mount Hood and Timberline Lodge; and the Pendleton Round-Up. Much of the footage in this film is similar to still photographs taken by Ralph I. Gifford.

The unedited film clips were filmed in about 1925-1935 and consist of 7 reels (3200 feet total length) of original 35 mm nitrate motion picture film negatives. The clips total about 35 minutes running time. A digital duplication master and DVD use copy of the clips are available.

The clips depict a variety of subjects. Many pertain to alpine search and rescue and may have been shot to produce a training film. These clips include footage of mountaineers on Mount Hood; staged rescue of an injured climber; use of a portable radio to call for assistance; and evacuation of the injured man by car and airplane. One of the rescuers is wearing a "Crag Rats Hood River" patch. The Crag Rats were founded in 1926 and are the oldest mountain search and rescue organization in the United States.

This unedited footage also includes scenes of Benjamin A. Gifford at his home at Salmon Creek, Washington; two young women with a motorized toy boat in a stream; a home, pond, and natural spring or water feature; a family at the beach; two boys (with their mother?) going to school; an airplane taking off and landing at the beach and in a field; footage of Mt. Hood shot during an airplane flight;

and a radio operator. There is also footage of a traffic survey station and motor truck scale, perhaps in Portland, that includes weighing, measurement, and inspection of a Carstens truck.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

Ralph I. Gifford Motion Pictures (P 218-SG 3), Oregon State University Archives, Corvallis, Oregon.

Administrative Information

Custodial History

The materials were donated to the Horner Museum in 1986 by Ben L. and Beth Gifford.

Acquisition Information

The motion picture films were transferred from the Horner Museum to the University Archives in July 1996.

Related Materials

This is one component of the Gifford Photographic Collection (P 218) held by the OSU Archives. Other components are: Benjamin A. Gifford Photographs (P 218-SG 1); Ralph I. Gifford Photographs (P 218-SG 2); Wanda M. Gifford Photographs (P 218-SG 4); Ben L. Gifford Photographs (P 218-SG 5); Gifford Collection Photographs by Unknown or Other Photographers (P 218-SG 6); and Gifford Collection Documentary Materials (P 218-SG 7). The Ralph I. Gifford Photographs (P 218-SG 2) include many still photographs of the same locations and sites depicted in *The New Oregon Trail* film. Many of the photographs that Ralph Gifford made for the Highway Department are held by the Oregon State Archives in Salem. A collection of Harold B. Say Photographs are held at the University of Oregon Special Collections and University Archives.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Bridges--Oregon.

Fishing--Oregon.

Indians of North America--Columbia Plateau.

Mountaineering--Search and rescue operations--Oregon--Hood, Mount.

Parks--Oregon.

Waterfalls--Columbia River.

Personal Names :

Gifford, Benjamin A.

Corporate Names :

Crag Rats.

Pendleton Round-Up.

Timberline Lodge (Mount Hood, Or.)

Geographical Names :

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<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv14089>

Cascade Range.
Celilo Falls (Wash.)
Columbia River Gorge (Or. and Wash.)
Columbia River Highway (Or.)
Columbia River.
Crater Lake National Park (Or.)
Hood, Mount (Or.)
McKenzie River (Or.)
Metolius River (Or.)
Oregon Caves National Monument (Or.)
Oregon--Description and travel.
Pacific Coast (Or.)
Portland (Or.)
Rogue River (Klamath County-Curry County, Or.)
Umpqua River (Or.)
Wallowa Mountains (Or.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Cellulose nitrate film.
Motion pictures (visual works).

Other Creators :

Personal Names :

Say, Harold B.
(creator)

Corporate Names :

Castle Films, inc.
(creator)
Oregon. State Highway Dept.
(creator)

Finding aid prepared by Lawrence A. Landis; updated by Elizabeth Nielsen.
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