Overview of the Collection

Creator Palmer, Joel, 1810-1881
Title Joel Palmer papers
Dates 1851-1879 (inclusive)
Quantity 12 linear feet, (25 containers, 3 oversize folders)

Joel Palmer (1810-1881) began his political career in Indiana, where he served as a state legislator until he came to Oregon in 1847. Shortly after his arrival, Palmer became Superintendent of Indian Affairs, a post he held until 1857. He also served as an Oregon state representative and senator, and was a losing candidate in the 1870 governor's race. The Joel Palmer Papers comprise correspondence, official records of the Oregon Superintendency, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, documents relating to the Siletz Indian Reservation, photographs, and miscellaneous papers. The collection includes a notebook documenting the 1847 publication of Palmer's Journal of Travels over the Rocky Mountains, his account of his 1845 journey to Oregon.

Repository University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives.
Access Restrictions Collection is open to the public. Collection must be used in Special Collections and University Archives Reading Room. Collection or parts of collection may be stored offsite. Please contact Special Collections and University Archives in advance of your visit to allow for transportation time.
Languages English
Sponsor Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Historical Note

Joel Palmer was born October 4, 1810 in Elizabethtown, Ontario (Canada) to Ephraim and Anna Palmer. When Joel was two his family fled the ravages of the War of 1812 and settled in the frontier village of Lowville in northern New York. At twelve years of age Joel was "bound out" (a form of
indentured servitude) to the Haworth family in the Catskill Mountains. In 1826 at age 16 he left the Catskills for Philadelphia; there he married Catherine Caffee in 1830, who died giving birth to their daughter. In 1836 he married Sarah Anne Derbyshire and moved to Laurel, Indiana, where he worked as a canal-building contractor. In 1843 Palmer was elected to the Indiana state legislature, representing Franklin County as a Democrat. He won a second term in 1844.

In April 1845 Palmer visited Oregon, which was not yet a territory; he recounts the trip in his Journal of Travels Over the Rocky Mountains. In 1847 he brought his wife and children to Oregon to settle permanently. That winter the Cayuse War broke out, and Palmer was chosen to be the commissary general of the volunteer fighting force. Within weeks he was also appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the provisional government, and became one of three men serving on the Peace Commission.

In 1848 Palmer joined the Gold Rush to California. He returned the next year and encouraged the growth of the town of Dayton, planting orchards and helping to build a sawmill. In 1853 he was appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs, now serving the officially recognized government of the Oregon Territory. He negotiated nine treaties between 1854 and 1855, and helped settle difficulties during the Yakima Indian War. However, Palmer's tolerant treatment of Indians and his attempts to restrain settler activities led to campaigns against him, and in 1857 he was removed from office.

Palmer spent the last twenty years of his life pursuing a variety of mostly failed business ventures. He remained active in politics, and became speaker of Oregon's house of representatives in 1862. In 1864 he was elected to the state senate, and declined to serve again in 1866. In 1870 he was defeated as Republican candidate for governor, but in 1871 he accepted a post as Indian agent at Siletz, from which he resigned in 1873. General Joel Palmer died on June 9, 1881; he was survived by his wife Sarah and their eight children.

Content Description

The Joel Palmer Papers comprise correspondence, official records of the Oregon Superintendency, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, documents relating to the Siletz Indian Reservation, and miscellaneous papers.

Letters and miscellaneous papers are housed in Boxes 1 through 5. The correspondence concerns business, politics, and administrative matters.

Official records of the Oregon Superintendency, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, between the years 1852 and 1856. These documents are housed from Box 6 through Folder 7 of Box 22.

Documents concerning the Siletz Indian Reservation where Palmer served as agent between 1871 and 1873 are housed from Box 22, Folder 8 through Box 23.

The collection includes a notebook documenting the 1847 publication of Palmer's Journal of Travels over the Rocky Mountains, his account of his 1845 journey to Oregon.

Photographs in the collection include pioneer portraits, circa 1853.

Administrative Information

Joel Palmer papers, 1851-1879
http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv32992
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Detailed Description of the Collection

Description

Guide to the Joel Palmer Papers

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms:
- Indian agents--Oregon
- Indians of North America--Oregon--Census
- Indians of North America--Oregon--Treaties
- Overland journeys to the Pacific
- Yakama Indians--Wars, 1855-1859

Personal Names:
- Palmer, Joel, 1810-1881

Geographical Names:
- Siletz Indian Reservation (Or.)

Form or Genre Terms:
- Correspondence
- Overland journals--1845
- Photographs

Occupations:
- Legislators--Oregon

Rose M. Smith
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