

John Owen papers, 1850-1871

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Owen, John, 1818-1889
Title	John Owen papers
Dates	1850-1871 (inclusive) 1850 1871
Quantity	.75 linear feet of shelf space
Collection Number	MC 44 (collection)
Summary	John Owen (1818-1889), a pioneer fur trader in the Northwest, built Fort Owen in the Bitterroot Valley, Montana Territory, and served as a special agent for the Flathead Indians. Collection contains diaries and journals (1850-1871); a combined register of births, deaths, and marriages of Fort Owen residents; a letterpress book (1858-1859); an account book (1850-1860) for trade at Fort Owen, which also contains accounts (1876-1889) for some other firm; and a bill of sale (1850) for the land on which the St. Mary's Mission was built.
Repository	Montana Historical Society, Research Center Archives Montana Historical Society Research Center Archives 225 North Roberts PO Box 201201 Helena MT 59620-1201 Telephone: 406-444-2681 Fax: 406-444-5297 mhslibrary@mt.gov
Access Restrictions	Collection 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

A native of Pennsylvania, born in 1818, John Owen first came to what is now Montana as a sutler for Colonel Loring's Oregon-bound column. In 1850, he purchased the site of St. Mary's Mission from Jesuit missionaries, and there built his trading post, Fort Owen. Owen operated his post as a trading center for white trappers and Indians of the area, and his fort also served as a way station to an increasing influx of settlers. Fort Owen contained the first commercial grist mill in the area and served other important functions. In 1856, because of his special relationship with the Flathead Indians, Owen was appointed special agent to that tribe and its affiliates. He held this position until 1862. Owen's mind began to fail in the early 1870s, and he was hospitalized in Helena until 1877, when he was transferred to the care of relatives in Philadelphia. He died there on July 12, 1889.

Content Description

This collection contains sixteen diaries, detailing John Owen's life and his many excursions throughout the Northwest (1850-1871). Also, there are a register of births, deaths, and marriages; (1858-1860); copied outgoing letters (1858-1859); and an account book for trade at Fort Owen (1850-1860). This last volume also was used for mercantile and farm accounts (1876-1889), possibly by the Fort's subsequent owner, Washington J. McCormick.

Use of the Collection

Restrictions on Use

Researchers must use collection in accordance with the policies of the Montana Historical Society. The Society does not necessarily hold copyright to all materials in the collection. In some cases permission for use may require additional authorization from the copyright owners. For more information contact an archivist.

Preferred Citation

Item description and date. Collection Title. Collection Number. Box and Folder numbers. Montana Historical Society Research Center, Archives, Helena, Montana.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

Arranged by series

Location of Collection

2:5-5

Acquisition Information

Acquisition information available upon request

Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection

Biographical Materials

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
1 / 1	Letters of information re John Owen [from Mary Winslett; library staff]	1922

Incoming Correspondence

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
1 / 2	J.W. Denver; Phillip H. Sheridan	1873

Outgoing Correspondence

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
1 / 3	"Fort Owen Register and Letter Book 1858 and 1859"; miscellaneous	1858-1860, 1869

Miscellaneous Correspondence

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
1 / 4	U.S. Department of Interior to Benjamin F. Potts re John Owen land claim	1875

Diaries

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
1 / 5	"Journey from Fort Owen via Fort Hall to Walla Walla in 1851"; "Diary and A/c Book of Ft. Owen in 1851 and 1852"; "Diary of a Journey from Ft. Owen to the Dalles in 1852"	1851-1852
1 / 6	"Journey from Ft. Owen to Salmon River & Return in 1854"; "Diary of a Journey from the Dalles to Ft. Owen in 1854"; "Fort Owen Journal 1854-1855"	1854-1855
1 / 7	"Fort Owen Diary for 1856"; "Fort Owen Journal 1857 and 1858"; "Diary of a trip from Walla Walla to Fort Owen in 1857.-- Also of return trip to Walla Walla in 1858"	1856-1858

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1 / 8	"Diary of a Journey to Ft. Benton in 1858"; "Fort Owen Journal 1860-1861"; "Fort Owen Diary, M.T. 1862, 1863 & part of 1865"	1858-1865
1 / 9	"Diary of a Journey from Fort Owen to Walla Walla in 1863, etc. etc."; "Diary of a Journey from the North Plate [Platte] to Montana in 1864"	1863-1864
2 / 1	"Fort Owen diary for 1865, 1866 & 1867"; untitled diary	1865-1871

Financial Records

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
2 / 2	"Fort Owen a/c Book"	1850-1860, 1876-1889

Legal Documents

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
2 / 3	"Application for Admission of Maj. Jno. Owen, Insane, to the Territorial Hospital, Lewis & Clarke Co."	1874
2 / 4	Bill of sale for land on which Fort Owen was built	1850

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Frontier and pioneer life--Montana
 Fur trade--Montana
 Overland journeys to Montana
 Trading posts--Montana
 Vital statistics--Montana

Personal Names :

Owen, John, 1818-1889
 (creator)

Geographical Names :

Fort Owen (Mont.)

St. Mary's Mission (Mont.)

Finding aid prepared by MHS Staff
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