

William Fraser Tolmie papers, 1833-1865

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Tolmie, William Fraser
Title	William Fraser Tolmie papers
Dates	1833-1865 (inclusive) 1833 1865
Quantity	.42 cubic ft. (2 boxes)
Collection Number	4577 (Accession No. 4577-001)
Summary	Mid-19th-century superintendent of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company's Nisqually farm, whose writings describe the natural setting and native peoples of the Pacific Northwest.
Repository	University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Special Collections University of Washington Libraries Box 352900 Seattle, WA 98195-2900 Telephone: 206-543-1929 Fax: 206-543-1931 speccoll@uw.edu
Access Restrictions	Open to all users.
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was partially provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Biographical Note

Best known for managing the Nisqually farm of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company (an agricultural subsidiary of the Hudson's Bay Company), Dr. William Fraser Tolmie played a key role in the Company's development of the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia in the mid-nineteenth century. His personal observations about the region's landscape, plant life, and Native Americans have endured as a rich, primary source of regional history.

Tolmie was born in Inverness, Scotland, in 1812 where he received a classical education. He went on to Glasgow University where he became doctor of medicine in 1832 at the age of twenty. Although medicine was his profession, botany was his hobby and is a prevalent theme in his writings.

After receiving his medical degree, Tolmie went to work for the Hudson's Bay Company at Ft. Vancouver in what is now Washington State. In 1833 he was one of three doctors at the fort, leaving little for him to do medically. During this time Tolmie pursued other interests in botany and religion and has been credited with giving the region's Native Americans their first formal religious instruction.

Supervisors at Ft. Vancouver had recognized that the young doctor possessed valuable leadership skills in addition to his medical knowledge, and within a few months gave him leadership roles outside Vancouver that shaped the rest of his long career with the Hudson's Bay Company and its subsidiary, the Puget Sound Agricultural Company (PSAC). The Company first sent Tolmie to Nisqually, south of

Puget Sound, where he was based from August until December of 1833. During his stay there, Tolmie was the first white man to attempt to climb Mt. Rainier and recorded the expedition in his journal, a copy of which is in the accession.

After his service at Nisqually, Tolmie was sent to Ft. McLoughlin on Milbank Sound (now part of British Columbia) as a trader, doctor, and Indian affairs man. Tolmie took an interest in the Native Americans and soon learned to speak many of their dialects. He stayed at Ft. McLoughlin until February, 1836, except for two absences. In May of 1834 he accompanied an expedition led by Peter Ogden on the Stickine River, and in 1834 he spent the summer at Ft. Simpson in northern British Columbia. Also while he was at Ft. McLoughlin, Tolmie started the first circulating library in the region.

In 1836 Tolmie returned to Ft. Vancouver, where he again lacked patients but developed his skills as a shrewd and skillful trader with Native Americans. He stayed at Vancouver for four years and acted as a trouble shooter whenever conflicts developed between the Company and nearby settlers. In 1841 Tolmie took a two-year leave of absence to return to Europe where he studied new developments in medicine and learned to speak Spanish.

After his return to Ft. Vancouver in 1843, Tolmie received an appointment as superintendent of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company's Nisqually farm. He received the post largely because of his agricultural interests and leadership skills, and soon implemented a hierarchical labor system with Native Americans and European indentured servants. Troubles between the British-owned Nisqually farm and the American settlers became a constant problem for Tolmie, especially after the farm became part of American territory after 1846. In 1856 Tolmie was promoted to Chief Factor of Ft. Nisqually, although he had been doing commensurate work all along.

In 1859 the Hudson's Bay Company transferred Tolmie to Victoria at the time of gold excitement on the Fraser River, but he still remained the Chief Factor and business head of the Nisqually farm until the PSAC sold the farm to the US in 1870. At Victoria he was in charge of the farms on Vancouver Island, was elected to the board of management of the Hudson's Bay Company, and at the same time conducted Nisqually's business affairs by mail. Tolmie also began focusing more of his attention on his family and politics. He had married the daughter of a Hudson's Bay Company's Chief Factor and had seven children, including Simon Fraser, who later became Premier of British Columbia. Tolmie's political career had begun at Nisqually in 1846 when he represented Lewis County at the Oregon legislature. In 1860 Tolmie became a member of the House of Legislature Assembly and when the Province of British Columbia was created he represented Victoria in the Legislature until ending his political career in 1878. He had officially retired from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1870, after 37 years of service.

Tolmie passed his remaining years on an 11,000 acre farm outside Victoria named Cloverdale. There he raised a large herd of cattle and engaged in considerable agricultural activity. He also was credited with introducing the dahlia, acacia, and the strawberry to this region. He died in 1886 at the age of 74.

Content Description

Tolmie's journal, which covers 1833 to 1836, is largely about the land, plants, and animals, and Native Americans that he encountered at Nisqually, Ft. McLoughlin, Ft. Vancouver, and during his various travels, including his attempted ascent of Mt. Rainier. The rest of the accession consists of correspondence mostly from the 1850s while he managed Nisqually farm, although some letters were written as early as 1845 and as late as 1865.

Use of the Collection

Alternative Forms Available

[View selections from this collection in digital format.](#)

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The accession was acquired from historian Clarence Bagley in 1919.

Related Materials

The original Tolmie journals are in the Archives of the Province of British Columbia at Victoria. An edited copy of his journals published in 1963, located in the repository, includes entries from 1830 to 1833 and some writings after 1836 that this accession does not contain. Researchers should see his biography file in the repository. The UW Libraries also has copies of Tolmie's publications, *The History of the Puget Sound and the Northwest*, and a study of the comparative vocabularies of the Indian Tribes of British Columbia, which he co-authored with George Dawson.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Incoming Letters

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
1/1	Alexander, John	1858
1/1	Allan, George T.	1856
1/1	Balch, Lafayette	1852, 1855
1/1	Ballenden, John	1852
1/1	Barnes, George A.	1855
1/1	Berens, W. H.	1857

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1/1	Bishop, H.	1850
1/1	Bradley, John	1851
1/1	Bray, L. C.	1853
1/1	Breck & Ogden	1853
1/1	Brotchie, W.	1853, 1854
1/1	Chambers, Thomas M.	1850
1/1	Chenoweth, Francis A.	1854-1859
1/1	Cole, G. E.	1854
1/1	Cole, (G. E.) Eldridge & Co.	1854
1/2	D'Herbonier, Rev. L.	1857
1/2	Dement, John	1851, 1854
1/2	Dodge, Bruce	1859
1/2	Dorr, Eben May	1850
1/2	Douglas, James	1845-1858, 1864
1/2	Dumilatre, P.	1853
1/3	Ebey, Isaac	1854
1/3	Ebey, W. S.	1853
1/3	Ensign, George H.	1853
1/3	Fay, R. C.	1850
1/3	Finlayson, Roderick	1845-1859, n.d.
1/3	Frost, M. H.	1856

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1/3	Fuller, Truman, H.	1857
1/4	Gates, Levi S.	1859
1/4	Gibbs, George	1852, 1856
1/4	Goldborough, H. A.	1850-1852
1/4	Gove, Warner	1856
1/4	Graham, Jas. P.	1847-1853
1/4	Haden, John M.	1853
1/4	Hardisty, Joseph	1851
1/4	Hawkins, J. S.	1859
1/4	Hedges, A. T.	1855
1/4	Hill, B. H.	1850
1/4	Hindman, William	1854
1/4	Holbrook, Amory	1852, 1854
1/4	Howard, W. A.	1852
1/4	Huggins, Edward	1865
1/4	Hunt, James M.	1855
1/4	Huntington, H. D.	1858
1/4	Ingalls, Rufus	1857
1/4	James, Samuel	1856
1/4	Keys, E. D.	1855, 1856
1/4	Lancaster, Columbia	1854

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1/4	Larnard, C. H.	1854
1/4	Lowe, James	1855
1/4	Lowe, Thomas	1853
1/5	Lowe, Thomas	1849
1/6	McClellan, George B.	1853
1/6	McKenzie, K.	1854-1858
1/6	McKinlay, Archibald	1850-1857
1/6	McLean, Alex	1854
1/6	McPherson, John	1855
1/6	MacTavish, Dugald	1853-1857
1/6	Mason, C. H.	1855
1/6	Maxon, I. G.	1856
1/6	Meigs, George A.	1859
1/6	Mendell, G. H.	1856
1/6	Moses, Simpson P.	1851-1857
1/6	Munro, Alexander	1859
1/7-9	Ogden, Peter Skeen	1846-1854
2/1	Nugen, John A.	1855-1856
2/1	Packard, John A.	1857
2/1	Pease, William C.	1855
2/1	Peers, Henry N.	1856, n.d.

Container(s)	Description	Dates
2/1	Pelly, J. W.	1849
2/1	Pemberton, B.	1852
2/1	Pemberton, I. D.	1856
2/1	Poe, A. M.	1850
2/1	Prevost, James	1857
2/1	Ricard, (Pere)	1849, 1856
2/1	Roberts, George B.	1850
2/1	Scranton, John	1854, 1857
2/1	Simmons, George	1854
2/1	Simmons, Michael T.	1855
2/1	Simpson, George	1858
2/1	Sinclair, William	1857, 1858
2/1	Slaughter, W. A.	1854
2/1	Smith, Albert J.	1853
2/1	Smith, I. H.	1856
2/1	Swan, John M.	1857
2/2	Terry, G. C.	1854, 1856
2/2	Tilton, James	1855-1857
2/2	Van Bokkelen, I. I. H.	1859
2/2	Wallace, H. H.	1857
2/2	Weed & Hurd	1853

Container(s)	Description	Dates
2/2	White, T. S.	1856
2/2	Wiley, James	1856
2/2	Willard, G.	1856
2/2	Wishart, D. D.	1851
2/2	Work, John	1855

Outgoing Letters

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
2/3	Dalles, A. G.	1861
2/3	Huggins, E.	1853-1865
2/3	McMullin, Fayette	1858
2/3	Peers, Henry N.	1856
2/3	Sinclair, William	1857

Bill of Exchange, 1853

Box-folder2/4

Memoranda of Agreements

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
2/5	Chapman, John B.	1852
2/5	Huntington, H. D.	1854
2/5	McAlister, James; William P. Wells; W. Berry	1852

Container(s)	Description	Dates
2/5	Parker & Foster	1852
2/5	Simmons, M. T.	1849
2/5	Tolmie, W. A. and Joseph A. Cushman to U.S.A.	1853

Journal (Photocopy), 1833-1836

Box-folder2/6

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Frontier and pioneer life--Washington (State)
Indians of North America--Washington (State)

Personal Names :

Tolmie, William Fraser--Archives

Corporate Names :

Hudson's Bay Company
Puget Sound Agricultural Company

Geographical Names :

Fort Nisqually (DuPont, Wash.)
Fort Vancouver (Wash.)
Rainier, Mount (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Diaries

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Personal Papers/Corporate Records (University of Washington)

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