

British North American Boundary Commission photographs, 1860-1875

Overview of the Collection

Creator	British North American Boundary Commission
Title	British North American Boundary Commission photographs
Dates	1860-1875 (inclusive) 1860 1875
Quantity	0.5 cubic feet, (1 slim document case and 1 letter document case)
Collection Number	Org. Lot 556
Summary	This collection consists of photographic copy negatives and copy prints taken by the British North American Boundary Commission along the 49th parallel during two separate survey periods, from 1860-1861 and from 1872-1875.
Repository	Oregon Historical Society, Davies Family Research Library Davies Family Research Library Oregon Historical Society 1200 SW Park Avenue Portland, OR 97205 Telephone: 503-306-5240 Fax: 503-219-2040 libreference@ohs.org
Access Restrictions	Collection is open for research.
Languages	English

Historical Note

From 1857 to 1862, Great Britain and the United States embarked upon a joint mission to establish the official boundary between Canada and the United States, along the 49th parallel, pursuant to agreement by treaty. Each country worked independently of the other, but they met periodically to cross-check each other's work. The British North American Boundary Commission's efforts of surveying, cutting wide swaths of timber, and marking the international boundary with cairns are well documented by its photographers. Commission members tasked with photographing the terrain and its inhabitants, as well as the work of the commission, are thought to have been "sappers," or enlisted men. The bulk of the officers on the commission were astronomers tasked with survey work.

Content Description

This collection consists of 149 black and white copy negatives and accompanying copy prints documenting the boundary surveying and clearing work performed by the British Royal Engineers Corps on the Canada-United States boundary during the years 1860-1861 and 1872-1875. The

images in this collection are copies of a selection of photographs from the official sets held within the collections of the Royal Engineers Corps Library in Kent, England.

The British commission's photographs show a number of the Hudson's Bay Company outposts across what are now known as Washington and British Columbia, as well as the commission's campsites and its winter resting places. Many portraits were also taken of indigenous inhabitants and lodgings that the commission encountered on its journeys. The commission identified these people as belonging to the Spokane, Colville, Salish, Kootenai, Pend d'Oreille (Kalispel), Chippewa, Sioux, and Assiniboine tribes.

Series 1 consists of images taken during the 1860-1861 survey. These focus on landscapes and outposts, beginning at Vancouver Island (Esquimalt) and moving generally east, through Vancouver (Washington Territory), along the Columbia River to The Dalles, then northeast to Fort Colville, Fort Shepherd, and along the 49th parallel and the Pend Oreille River to Siniakwateen. During this survey, the commission also took photographs on its return journey west, therefore the order of the images is not strictly geographic from west to east. Photographs from this survey end with views of the Rocky Mountains from Kensenehn station.

Series 2 consists of images from the second survey series, from 1872-1875, illustrating the last part of the transcontinental boundary to be surveyed, from Lake of the Woods (Ontario, Manitoba, and Minnesota) west to Waterton Lake (Alberta), with stops at Fort Pembina, Dufferin, the Souris River crossing, Grand Coteau station, and an Assiniboine camp.

Series 3 includes 31 images, likely from both survey periods, which remain unidentified. Image lists from the Royal Engineer Corps and associated articles on the commission projects are included.

Use of the Collection

Restrictions on Use

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Preferred Citation

British North American Boundary Commission photographs, Org. Lot 556, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

Collection is arranged in three series: Series 1. Survey, 1860-1861; Series 2. Surveys, 1872-1875; Series 3. Undated, unidentified images.

Acquisition Information

Purchased from the Royal Engineers Corps Library, April 1988 (Photo acc. 988M190).

Location of Originals

Original glass plate negatives and photographs are held at the Royal Engineers Corps Library in Gillingham, Kent, England.

Processing Note

OHS purchased unidentified copy negatives of original images from the Royal Engineers Corps Library, accompanied by lists of images and their official descriptive captions. Best efforts have been made to match images with their captions. Similar collections at the Library of Congress and the Bancroft Library have been used as a basis for comparison, though these image sets available online are limited and are not identical to the Royal Engineers Corps collection. Some images remain unidentified.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Indians of North America
Landscapes--Canada, Western--Photographs
United States--Surveys

Corporate Names :

Great Britain. Army. Royal Engineers
Hudson's Bay Company

Geographical Names :

Canada--Boundaries--United States
Canada--Surveys
Northwest, Pacific--Surveys--History--19th century
Red River of the North
Turtle Mountains--N.D. and Man.

Form or Genre Terms :

Photographs

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