

William Henry Gray papers, 1835-circa 1867

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Gray, W. H. (William Henry), 1810-1889
Title	William Henry Gray papers
Dates	1835-circa 1867 (inclusive) 1835 1867 1835-1846 (bulk) 1835 1846
Quantity	0.3 cubic feet, (1 slim legal document case; 1 shared reel of microfilm)
Collection Number	Mss 1202
Summary	Papers of Dr. William Henry Gray (1810-1889), a physician and lay missionary for the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions who was active in the Oregon Territory. Includes typescript and original letters and other documents regarding missionary activities; typescript of the diary of Gray's wife, Mary Augusta Dix Gray; original of William Henry Gray's diary for 1836-1837, and original documents concerning a land claim dispute that Gray had with Josiah L. Parrish.
Repository	Oregon Historical Society Research Library 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.
Additional Reference Guides	William H. Gray's diary is described in "Overland passages: a guide to overland documents in the Oregon Historical Society," entry 87, and listed in "Platte River road narratives," entry 33. Mary Augusta Dix's diary is described in "Overland passages: a guide to overland documents in the Oregon Historical Society," entry 86.
Languages	English

Biographical Note

Dr. William Henry Gray, a physician and lay missionary for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, was born on May 10, 1810. In 1836, he joined Marcus Whitman and Henry H. Spalding to travel overland and establish a mission to convert Indigenous people in what would become the Oregon Territory. In 1837, Gray traveled east in order to obtain more recruits for the missions. While in New York in the spring of 1838, he married Mary Augusta Dix; the couple would have eight children. That summer, the Grays traveled overland to the Pacific Northwest with missionaries Elkanah Walker and Cushing Eells. William H. Gray continued missionary work until 1842. In 1843, he was involved in the Wolf Meetings and meeting at Champoeg that established the Oregon Provisional Government; he subsequently served as a member of the Provisional Legislature.

From 1846 to 1855, Gray farmed on the Clatsop plains, and from 1855 to 1858 operated a sawmill. From 1858 to 1864, he lived in British Columbia, where he worked in the Fraser River mines and built a boat that he piloted along the Okanogan and Columbia Rivers to Celilo Falls. He subsequently lived in Astoria, Oregon, and wrote a history of Oregon that was published in 1870. He also served as secretary of the Pioneer and Historical Society of Oregon. Mary Augusta Dix Gray died in 1881; William H. Gray died in 1889. The couple were initially buried in Astoria, but in 1916 their bodies were reinterred at the site of the Whitman Mission near Walla Walla, Washington.

Content Description

The collection includes papers and correspondence relating to William H. Gray becoming a missionary, the overland journeys he took as a missionary, and his missionary work; a journal from Gray's 1837 overland journey to the East; materials relating to Gray's history of Oregon; and papers related to a land claim dispute with Josiah L. Parrish. Correspondents include fellow missionary Elkanah Walker and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions secretary David Greene.

The manuscript journal of William Gray contains a record of his eastward journey in 1837 from Fort Vancouver to Utica, New York, to recruit additional missionaries for Henry H. Spalding's mission. In the journal, Gray describes his party's interactions with Indigenous peoples along the way, including an altercation with a band of Lakota (Sioux) on August 7, 1837 that, per his account, resulted in the deaths of several of his Indigenous guides and the loss of many of the party's horses and supplies. Also included is a typescript copy (1840-1842) of diary kept by Mary Augusta Dix Gray during her service at various missions, containing infrequent entries describing daily activities and life as a lay missionary.

Use of the Collection

Alternative Forms Available

Microfilm copies of letter to David Ambler and 1836-1837 diary are on Reel 2 of Mss 1200-Mss 1225 Microfilm, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

Preferred Citation

William Henry Gray papers, Mss 1202, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

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Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Acquired prior to 1971, including donations in 1905 and 1951 (RL2021-039-RETRO; RL2021-040-RETRO; RL2021-044-RETRO); as well as acquisitions most likely made in the late 19th or early 20th century (RL2021-045-RETRO).

Location of Originals

Original diary of Mary Augusta Dix Gray was in the possession of Mary A. Gray in August of 1951 when it was transcribed.

Original of letter from Elkanah Walker to William Gray, 1843, is held at the Washington State University Library.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Container(s)		Description	Dates
Box	Folder		
1	1	Letters of recommendation for William H. Gray written to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (typescript copies)	1835-1838
1	2	Correspondence from William H. Gray to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (typescript copies)	1836 February 17; 1836 September 19
1	3	Letter from William H. Gray to David Ambler about his overland journey to the Pacific Northwest (original, handwritten copy, and typescript copies)	1836 September 9
1	4	Correspondence and affidavits relating to altercation between William H. Gray's overland party and band of Lakota (Sioux)	1837 August 7-1838 April 3
1	5	Letter from Elkanah Walker to William H. Gray about Gray's leaving the mission and payment (photostatic reproduction)	1843 August 5
1	6	Journal of William H. Gray, including his overland journey to the East (original)	1836 December 28-1837 October 15
1	7	Journal of William H. Gray, including his overland journey to the East (typescript copy)	1836 December 28-1837 October 15

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1 8	Diary of Mary Augusta Dix Gray and loose papers therein (typescript copy)	1840 May 10-1842 September 21; 1845 January
1 9	Document granting William H. Gray safe passage through Indigenous lands; certificate appointing William H. Gray as assistant missionary	1838 February 27; 1838 March 13
1 10	Documents relating to arbitration of a land claim dispute between William H. Gray and Josiah L. Parrish (originals)	1846 August 12-19
1 11	Certificate to William H. Gray for purchasing five shares of new missionary packet boat Morning Star	1866 June
1 12	Documents relating to William H. Gray's history of Oregon: draft portion; summary of contents (originals); sample pages (photocopies)	circa 1867

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Indians of North America--Missions--Northwest, Pacific

Lay missionaries--Northwest, Pacific

Personal Names :

Gray, Mary Augusta Dix, 1810-1881

Gray, W. H. (William Henry), 1810-1889

Corporate Names :

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions

Form or Genre Terms :

correspondence

diaries

Other Creators :

Personal Names :

Gray, Mary Augusta Dix, 1810-1881

(creator)

Geoffrey B. Wexler; revised by Jeffrey A. Hayes
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