Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) Collection, 1890-1915

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2013
Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) Collection, 1890-1915

Descriptive Summary

Title: Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) Collection, 1890-1915
Dates: 1890-1915
Collection Number: P-004
Creator/Collector: Forbes, Andrew Alexander
Extent: 46 linear feet (Boxes: letter, ½ letter, 2 record storage, 6 ov, ov folders in mc-14)
Repository: Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Abstract: Andrew Alexander Forbes was the first resident photographer in the Owens Valley area of California. He maintained a commercial photo studio in Bishop from 1902 to 1916. In addition, Forbes also made panoramic murals and scenic calendars. Included in this collection are photographs and negatives depicting the Paiute Indians in the Owens Valley area and the natural scenery in the Eastern Sierra region. Also included are portraits of other Native American groups and cowboys, as well as photographs of mines, ranches, livestock, towns, and California missions. The photographs in this collection are arranged numerically.

Language of Material: English

Access
Research is by appointment only

Publication Rights
Permission to publish, quote or reproduce must be secured from the repository and the copyright holder

Preferred Citation
Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) Collection, 1890-1915. Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Acquisition Information
Andrew Alexander Forbes' archive was acquired from the photographer’s son J. McLaren Forbes by the History Department of the Natural History Museum in 1975.

Biography/Administrative History
Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) was born in Ottawa Township, Wisconsin, and became interested in photography around the late 1870s or early 1880s while working on his family's cattle ranch. Among his photographic achievements are photographs taken at the opening of the "Cherokee Strip" at the fourth Oklahoma land run in September 1893. It is not known how he took on the skill, but it is likely that he was influenced by his mother as well as by William Prettyman, George B. Cornish, and Thomas Croft, all whom he worked alongside during his time photographing western territories as an itinerant photographer. Forbes considered himself first and foremost a landscape photographer. He worked primarily with the bulky large format camera, which was not easy to work with on account of the size of the equipment and materials. However, his use of 8x10 negatives on color-blind plates yielded extremely high-quality prints. Before opening his own studio, he traveled throughout the United States, photographing railroad construction workers, cowboys, cattle roundups, sod houses, and Native Americans in areas such as Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. He settled with the rest of the Forbes family in California in 1890, first near Wildomar in Riverside County and later Santa Ana in Orange County. During this time he also photographed areas in California such as Death Valley and the Eastern Sierra. Around 1902, he established Forbes Studio on West Line Street in Bishop, Inyo County, California. His studio was immensely popular among the Paiute Indians in the area who frequently had their portraits taken by Forbes and became his friends. These relationships in turn also provided him with the unique opportunity to photograph their neighboring encampments in Owens Valley and Yosemite. A recurring subject was Paiute women in maternal scenes. In 1905, he was assigned to photograph water resources in Owens Valley for Fred Eaton, the former mayor of Los Angeles who was embroiled in the California Water Wars of the early 20th century. Forbes, however, opposed the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. In 1916, Forbes closed his studio and relocated to Southern California with his wife Mary Rozette Prutzman and their son J. McLaren Forbes in hopes of opening a new studio. Unfortunately, a new location never came to fruition. Aside from photography, Forbes was actively involved in his community, participating in church groups and local plays. He was also a member of the Odd Fellows Lodge. Forbes died in 1921 of a heart attack in Lompoc, California.

Scope and Content of Collection
The collection consists of negatives, prints and postcards. Andrew Alexander Forbes was the first resident photographer in the Owens Valley area of California. He maintained a commercial photo studio in Bishop from 1902 to 1916. In addition, Forbes also made panoramic murals and scenic calendars. Included in this collection are photographs and negatives.
depicting the Paiute Indians in the Owens Valley area and the natural scenery in the Eastern Sierra region. Also included are portraits of other Native American groups and cowboys, as well as photographs of mines, ranches, livestock, towns, and California missions in Inyo County and eastern California. The photographs in this collection are arranged numerically, but the finding aid is organized by geographic region.

**Indexing Terms**

Owens Valley (Calif.)--History--Pictorial works.
Northern Paiute Indians--Social life and customs.
Big Pine (Calif.) -- History
Bishop (Calif.) - History
Bodie (Calif.) -- History
Bowie (Ariz.) -- History
Canyons -- California
Cheyenne Indians -- Portraits
Cowboys
Death Valley National Park (Calif. and Nev.) -- History
Glaciers -- California
Hydroelectric power plants -- California -- Owens Valley
Ice caves -- California
Indians of North America -- Dwellings
Grand Canyon National Park (Ariz.)
Hopi Indian Reservation (Ariz.)
Cactus -- Arizona
Camp sites, facilities, etc. -- California

**P-004 Series**