Title: William Henry Bisbee Papers and Manuscripts
Identifier/Call Number: MSA.34
Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Autry Library
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 3.0 Linear feet (4 boxes)
Date (bulk): Bulk, 1862-1937
Date (inclusive): 1846-1937
Abstract:
creator: Bisbee, William Haymond
creator: Bisbee, William Henry, b. 1840
Related Archival Materials
Carter-Camp-Myers family papers, [ca. 1879-1924], UC Berkeley; Bancroft Library.
Processing history
Processing and finding aid completed by Holly Rose Larson, NHPRC Project Archivist, 2012 April 3, made possible through grant funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).
Scope and Contents
This collection of documents from 1846-1937 records William Henry Bisbee's military exploits during the Civil War, testimony of the Fetterman Massacre and other actions during the American Indian Wars, the Coeur d'Alene Miners' Strike, the Debs and Commonwealers' outbreaks, the Cuban War for Independence, and the Spanish-American War, as well as the production and publication of his biography, Through Four American Wars, written by Bisbee's grandson, William Haymond Bisbee.
Contents include books, certificates, collected correspondence and manuscripts, correspondence to and from Bisbee, ephemera, journals, manuscripts, maps, military orders, newspaper and magazine clippings, and telegrams. Photographic materials include albumen prints, several carte-de-visites, and a tintype.
Access
Collection is open for research. Appointments to view materials are required. To make an appointment please visit http://theautry.org/research/research-rules-and-application or contact library staff at rroom@theautry.org.
Use
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Preferred citation
William Henry Bisbee Papers and Manuscripts, 1846-1937, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MSA.34; [folder number] [folder title][date].
Acquisition
Purchase from Art Sowin, 1988 September 8.
Biographical Note
William Henry Bisbee was born to William and Harriet Bisbee in Woonsocket, Rhode Island on 1840 January 28. In 1853, Bisbee’s mother died, and left his father to raise five children. Bisbee got an opportunity to learn the dry goods trade in Philadelphia. Three years later, traveling businessman Fletcher G. Welch visited Philadelphia and hired Bisbee to go west to Ohio with him. In 1858, gold fever returned to Ohio. Welch had a dream of joining the gold seekers in Colorado, and opening a photography studio in the burgeoning community. Welch hired Bisbee to accompany him, and together with a couple other men, they set off in 1859. Their trek was months long and treacherous, and Bisbee began to learn the lay of the land as well as beginning relationships with Native American tribes and their cultures. By the time Fletcher, Bisbee, and their group reached the Denver area, their supplies were dwindling and their photography equipment had been ruined. They spent the summer of 1859 panning for gold, but came up empty handed. After some hunting trips to New Mexico, they sold off their unprofitable claims and returned to Ohio. Bisbee picked up mercantile trade again, now with experience in travel, the West, and Native American life.
While Bisbee was learning about the West, the Civil War had begun in the east, and President Abraham Lincoln put out a second call for Union Army volunteers. Bisbee responded by enlisting on 1861 September 2 and joined the 18th U.S.
Infantry, which fought under the Army of the Ohio and then the Army of the Cumberland. Bisbee fought in the Civil War for almost four years and sustained three injuries while fighting in such battles as Siege of Corinth, Pursuit of Bragg, Battle of Perryville, Battle of Murfreesboro at Stones River, the Tullahoma campaign, Battle of Hoovers Gap, the Atlanta Campaign under General Sherman, including the Siege of Atlanta, and Lookout Mountain. Bisbee sustained injuries at Hoover’s Gap and during the Siege of Atlanta, and received promotions to 2nd Lieutenant, 18th U.S. Infantry; 1st Lieutenant, which was awarded by President Abraham Lincoln to Bisbee for bravery at Stone’s River; Captain; and Adjutant 2nd Battalion.

Bisbee continued a life in the army, although he took time out to marry Lucy Katherine Shade in 1862. Bisbee then served the United States as military escort to settlers and their families to the Western Territories, areas that are now known as Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana. Bisbee, his wife Lucy and their 14-month-old son Eugene left Leavenworth, Kansas with other soldiers and their families and headed to Fort Kearney in the Nebraska Territory which is now Wyoming. This trek took Bisbee to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and the Nebraska territory where he helped construct Fort Kearney. Fort Kearney was the site of the Fetterman Massacre in 1866, on which Bisbee testified in court and recorded in his chapter in The Papers of the Order of Indian Wars. Following the massacre, Bisbee was promoted to Captain of the 4th Infantry, and continued his duties from 1870-1874 in Wyoming, Kentucky, Arkansas, Nebraska, Utah, and Idaho. He continued to be stationed in Wyoming and Nebraska through the 1880s.

Bisbee helped command troops in the Coeur d’Alene miner’s strike in 1892 and the Debs riots and Commonwealers’ outbreaks in 1893 and 1894. He was promoted again to Major of the 17th U.S. Infantry in 1893, and again to Lieutenant Colonel of the 8th Infantry in 1897.

Bisbee then left the mainland and commanded troops in the Santiago Campaign in Cuba, serving the U.S. military through the Cuban war for independence in 1898 and 1899. Bisbee was promoted to Colonel of the 13th Infantry in January 1899, but then requested a leave of absence to join the U.S. forces which had just been shipped to the Philippines for the Spanish-American War. Bisbee was granted permission and fought in Manila and Luzon until 1900, at which point he was appointed governor over sub-districts in Pangasinan and Nueva Ecija Provinces.

In 1901 October 2, Bisbee was appointed Brigadier General of the U.S. Army by President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1902 October 1, Bisbee returned to the United States and retired from 41 years of service with four War Medals awarded to him by Congress and an impressive rate of promotions commissioned by Presidents Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, and Theodore Roosevelt.

After serving in the United States military for over 40 years and traveling with his family all over the United States, Bisbee retired with his wife to Brookline, Massachusetts. Bisbee did not partake in military life after his retirement, but he remained an active student and commenter on war, including World Wars I and II. Bisbee wrote articles for the Army and Navy Journal, and began telling his life story through correspondence to his grandson William Haymond Bisbee. William Haymond Bisbee published his grandfather’s biography, Through Four American Wars, in 1931.

In 1940, at age 100, Bisbee received another honor: a Purple Heart for acts of bravery in his military career. Bisbee died two years later on 1942 June 11 at the age of 102. He is buried with his wife Lucy in Arlington National Cemetery.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

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Cartes de visite
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