Finding Aid to the Thrilling and Tragic Account of a Perilous Journey Overland to California MS.612

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Title: Thrilling and Tragic Account of a Perilous Journey Overland to California

Identifier/Call Number: MS.612

Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Braun Research Library

Language of Material: English

Physical Description: 0.1 linear feet(1 folder)

Date: circa 1942

Abstract: This is a photostatic copy of a manuscript entitled Thrilling and Tragic Journal written by George McKinstry, Jr., chronicling his journey with the Donner Party from 1846-1847. This photostatic copy was made in 1942 from the original in the Edward E. Ayer Collection at the Newberry Library in Chicago. A label on the front of the file folder states that the diary was actually written by Patrick Breen, who gave the diary to George McKinstry in the spring of 1847.

creator: Breen, Patrick, ca. 1805-1868
creator: McKinstry, George, Jr., 1810-1882

Biographical note
George W. McKinstry (c. 1810 -1882) arrived in California in 1846, after making the overland journey westward from Independence, Missouri. He became the first American sheriff of California. McKinstry assisted in the rescue of the Donner Party and chronicled the rescue expedition in the Breen Diary, which was submitted to Washington.

McKinstry arrived in San Diego in 1858 and lived there until his death in 1882. During this time, he most notably served as a dentist, physician, and sheriff of San Diego. In addition to these duties, McKinstry served as a politician (although what post is unknown) and as the Chairman of the Republican Committee of Southern California. He actively lobbied that California not secede from the Union.

McKinstry was given the post of Collector of Customs at the Port of San Diego. Throughout his life in San Diego, McKinstry spent many months with the local Native American population, and kept a daily diary which chronicled his life in San Diego.

Related materials note
Autry Library has broadside advertising publication, 90.253.7081.

Location of originals
Edward E. Ayer Collection at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

Scope and Contents
This is a photostatic copy of a manuscript entitled Thrilling and Tragic Journal written by George McKinstry, Jr., chronicling his journey with the Donner Party from 1846-1847. This article was originally printed in St. Louis Reveille and The Dollar Newspaper in 1847. This photostatic copy was made in 1942 from the original in the Edward E. Ayer Collection at the Newberry Library in Chicago. A label on the front of the file folder states that the diary was actually written by Patrick Breen, who gave the diary to George McKinstry in the spring of 1847. The label also states that the manuscript was published in the California Star and the Nashville, Tennesse paper, Whig in 1847.

Preferred citation
Thrilling and Tragic Account of a Perilous Journey Overland to California, 1942, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.612.

Processing history
Processed by Glenna Schroeder, circa 1977-1981. Finding aid completed by Holly Rose Larson, NHPRC Processing Archivist, 2012 October 22, made possible through grant funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commissions (NHPRC).

Acquisition
Purchased by Library for the Munk Library of Arizoniana, 1942 July.

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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.

Biographical note
Patrick Breen (ca. 1805-1868). Breen was born in Ireland, emigrated to Canada in 1828, and later moved to Iowa Territory, marrying Margaret in 1831. Patrick and Margaret had seven children -- John, Edward, Patrick, Simon, Peter, James, and Isabella, and in the spring of 1846, the family joined The Doner Party, bound for California. The party's ill-fated journey across the Sierra Nevada Mountains was partially documented in the diary Breen kept while stranded in a mountain camp at Donner (then called Truckee) Lake. After their rescue, the family arrived at Sutter's Fort, New Helvetia, in March of 1847. The Breens then lived for a short time on the Consumnes River and then in San Jose. In February of 1848 they settled in San Juan Bautista -- becoming its first non-Spanish-speaking residents -- where Breen would live as a rancher for the remainder of his life. Patrick Breen died in 1868.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**
- Diaries
- Donner Party
- Manuscripts
- Overland journeys to the Pacific
- Photostats