Inventory of the State Geological Survey Records, 1860-1874

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Inventory of the State Geological Survey Records, 1860-1874

Inventory: F3747

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Descriptive Summary
Title: State Geological Survey records,
Date (inclusive): 1860-1874
Inventory: F3747
Creator: State Geological Survey
Extent: 2 file folders
Repository: California State Archives
Sacramento, California
Abstract: The California State Geological Survey was created by statute in 1860. The records include the correspondence of the State Geologist, Josiah D. Whitney, with the Governor and State Legislature. Included are four file folders of correspondence, reports, and statements of expenditures
Language: English.
Access
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Preferred Citation
State Geological Survey Records, F3747, California State Archives.
Acquisition Information
Administrative History
The California State Geological Survey was created by statute in 1860. The act, entitled An Act to create the Office of the State Geologist and define the Duties thereof, appointed Josiah D. Whitney as the State Geologist. (Chapter 254, Stats. 1860) He and his assistants were to make a complete geological survey of the State and from this work publish reports, maps, and diagrams. The State could then sell the volumes through the Secretary of State. The act also gave the survey an initial $20,000 appropriation for expenses.

Josiah Dwight Whitney was among the most noted of mining scientists in the United State in 1860. He had published a book on mining in 1854 that became a standard treatise on the subject. From this work he was appointed State Chemist of Iowa. In 1860 he was selected to be State Geologist of California largely through the support of Justice Stephen Field, entrepreneur S.O. Putnam, and noted scientists Louis Agissiz and the father and son Benjamin Sillimans. His selection and tenure was often controversial. He frequently clashed with the legislature and governor over the amount of appropriations for and direction of the work of the survey. He would remain the head of the survey until it was terminated in 1874. At this time he headed east and eventually became head of the School of Mines at Harvard University.

The work of the survey that Whitney envisioned differed from the vision that the Legislature had. The Legislature expected that the survey would provide the State with accurate information on the location of gold deposits throughout California. Whitney believed the survey should be more focused on pure science. He believed that only through the unrestricted study of the state could they discover the secrets of the state.

The survey, often known as the Whitney Survey, attracted many of the best young scientists in the nation. Whitney selected William Brewer as the leader of the field parties. Brewer had trained in Europe and would go onto to become a professor at Yale University. William Ashburner was the mining expert for the survey and was one of the original Commissioners of Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove. Charles Hoffmann was a German engineer who did much of the survey map work and would become one of the leaders in American topography. Clarence King joined the survey in 1863 and by 1878 was in charge of the U.S. Geological Survey.

Nearly all of the fieldwork of the survey was done from 1860 to 1867. After 1867 and through its conclusion in 1874, most of the work was the creation of reports and maps on specific topics and regions of the State. Among its accomplishments was the first large-scale attempt to systematically map the state, a guidebook to Yosemite Valley, first exploration of the southern Sierra, and a report on the geology of the state.

The State Geological Survey came to an end in 1874 when Governor Newton Booth abolished the office of State Geologist. Much of their uncompleted work was then transferred to the University of California.

Collection Scope and Content Summary

Records of the California State Geological Survey generally reflect the relationship between the head of the survey, Josiah Dwight Whitney, with the Governor and State Legislature. Included are four file folders of correspondence, reports, and statements of expenditures.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Archives online finding aids. Scientists--California--History.
1. State Geological Survey Files, 1860-1874

Physical Description: 4 file folders

Scope and Content Note

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

Chronological files of the California State Geological Survey, or Whitney Survey. Included are many correspondences by Josiah D. Whitney and other members of the Geological Survey to the governors of California regarding progress of the Survey, its funding, and progress made on publications produced by the Survey. Also contained in the files are letters of congratulations on the formation of the Survey, support for its continuance, and requests for copies of its publications. Bills and receipts are also included for the initial outfitting of the Survey. Throughout the files are found statements of expenditures for work done over either a six or twelve month period. Another series of correspondence is related to the controversial work done by Amos Bowman for the Survey.

Of interest is a petition calling for the continuance of the Survey that is signed by such figures as R.S. Williamson, Alvinza Hayward, Amos Bowman, Henry Hanks, Theodore Hittell, A.W. Von Schmidt, J. Ross Browne, Britton & Rey, J.D. Hooker, H.H. Bancroft & Co., and Goodyear & Blake. Also of interest is a statement by C.E. Hoffmann, Chief Topographer, regarding the inaccuracies in the codes on location of county boundaries. In the letters concerning the dissolution of the Survey is a statement by Whitney on his suggestions for disposition of their collection and includes a call for a State Museum.