Guide to the Filibuster Expeditions Collection MS 161

Finding aid prepared by Katrina White
Collection processed as part of grant project supported by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) with generous funding from The Andrew Mellon Foundation.
San Diego History Center Document Collection
1649 El Prado, Suite 3
San Diego, CA, 92101
619-232-6203
June 8, 2011
Title: Filibuster Expeditions Collection
Identifier/Call Number: MS 161
Contributing Institution: San Diego History Center Document Collection
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 0.25 Linear feet (1 box)
Date (inclusive): 1851-1908
Abstract: This collection contains primarily secondary sources related to several filibustering expeditions into Mexico and Central America in the 1850s, including one later filibustering attempt in the 1880s.
creator: Pioneer Society of San Diego County.
Comments
The collection is most likely a donation from Millard Hudson and the Historical Society of Southern California. The initial donation was made to the Pioneer Society of San Diego County; this and other collections were later transferred to the San Diego History Center in 1930. The collection is believed to be research notes used to produce articles for the annual publications of the Historical Society of Southern California in the early part of the 20th century.
Processing Information
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Preferred Citation
Filibuster Expeditions Collection, MS 161, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA.
Conditions Governing Use
The San Diego History Center (SDHC) holds the copyright to any unpublished materials. SDHC Library regulations do apply.
Conditions Governing Access
This collection is open for research.
Arrangement
Items in the collection are arranged by subject.
Biographical / Historical Note
The term ‘filibusters’ was first used to describe pirates of the 17th century, but later referred to an assemblage of people (mostly war veterans and self-proclaimed “American patriots”) who believed that “manifest destiny” was not yet complete by the mid-nineteenth century. Thus they believed there remained a “divine right” to explore and “liberate” some of the territory belonging to countries such as Mexico, Honduras, and Nicaragua. During the mid-nineteenth century, Mexico was experiencing civil unrest. Filibusters attempted to take advantage of this instability to overthrow the local governments and create their own sovereign nations. Largely unsuccessful, filibustering missions into Mexico and Central America began around the early 1840s and continued for about fifty years, ending in the late 1890s. While most filibusters began their expeditions in San Francisco, some famous filibusters such as William Walker, Henry Crabb, and Joseph Morehead established San Diego connections.
William Walker, arguably the most notorious of the filibusters, was noted for his expeditions into Mexico, Honduras, and Nicaragua. A lawyer and journalist prior to his filibustering career, he was considered an arrogant man by some close to him. Just before one of his filibustering expeditions into Mexico, Walker proclaimed himself “President of Sonora and Baja California.” After failing to colonize the state of Sonora, he turned his expeditions to Honduras and Nicaragua. During one of his filibustering expeditions in Central America, he was executed by the Honduran government.
Henry Crabb, the filibuster with perhaps the most defined connections to the American Southwest, was a veteran of the Indian Wars and a former California state senator. He was married to a Sonoran woman. After procuring the necessary provisions for an expedition into Mexico, Crabb began his journey into Sonora in the 1850s with 69 other men. Only one or two men returned from the trip alive (the number of survivors varies depending on the source consulted). The periodicals of the day termed the execution of Crabb’s expeditionary party “The Crabb Massacre.” The vast majority of the men in the expedition were executed, including Crabb, whose head was reportedly preserved in a jar of alcohol and displayed to any would-be filibusters as a warning not to invade Mexican territory. There remains controversy over whether Crabb was a filibuster, an invited guest of his in-laws, or an explorer taking advantage of Mexico’s liberal colonization laws of the time. Two later filibustering attempts arose in Southern California between 1889 and 1890; first in Los Angeles in 1889, and again in San Diego in 1890. The filibuster plan was secretly proposed by an agent of the International Company of Mexico.
as a way to increase the value of the company’s landholdings in the Ensenada area in Baja California. According to a letter written by Walter Gifford Smith, one of the individuals involved, the syndicate’s agent organized a group of men who planned the invasion of Ensenada and overthrow of the local government, in preparation for U.S. annexation. Several prominent San Diego citizens were involved. The scheme was discovered prior to its undertaking and revealed in an article in the San Diego Union, defeating the plan and placing the individuals involved under heavy scrutiny and a federal investigation.

The phase of filibusters exploring into Mexico and South America ended in the late nineteenth century when the American government was afraid the filibusters might interfere with U.S. neutrality laws and foreign relations. With visions of starting their own slave territory, many Civil War veterans attempted to colonize the frontier of Mexico, but none succeeded. Just as the pirates of the seventeenth century, filibustering faded away with the changing political, social, and economic trends of the late nineteenth century.

Scope and Content
This collection contains numerous secondary sources and one primary source on several filibustering expeditions into Mexico, primarily from the 1850s. The principal expeditions explored in the collection include those of William Walker, General Morehead, and Henry Crabb. Additionally, there are several documents related to the failed filibuster attempt in Ensenada in 1890, including an original letter written by Walter Gifford Smith. Other documents included in the collection cover the Indian uprisings in San Diego in the early 1850s, specifically the attack on the Warner Ranch. The majority of the documents included in the collection are transcriptions of newspaper articles and other publications related to the aforementioned filibustering expeditions.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Buchanan, James, 1791-1868
Capron, John G.
Cass, Lewis, 1782-1866
Crabb, Henry Alexander, d. 1857
Crosthwaite, Philip
Hudson, Millard F.
International Company of Mexico.
Morehead, Joseph C.
O’Meara, James, 1825-1903
Pesqueira, Ignacio, 1820-1886
Pierce, Franklin, 1804-1869
San Francisco Volunteers.
Sherman, Edwin A. (Edwin Allen), 1829-1914
Smith, Walter Gifford
Smythe, William E. (William Ellsworth), 1861-1922
Van Ness, Isaac
Walker, William, 1824-1860
Warner, J. J. (Juan Jose), 1807-1895
Ensenada (Baja California, Mexico)
Filibusters
Los Angeles (Calif.)
San Diego (Calif.)
San Francisco (Calif.)
Sonora (Mexico : State)

Box-folder 1:1

<table>
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<tr>
<th>San Diego Indian uprisings, 1851 February–1906 September and undated</th>
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<td>Transcription of correspondence from Major Edwin A. Sherman to William E. Smythe, September 19, 1906.</td>
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Box-folder 1:2  General Morehead’s expedition, 1851 April 26–October 13
   Includes:
   Transcriptions of articles from the Daily Alta California, 1851.

Box-folder 1:3  William Walker’s expedition to Sonora, 1853 October-1854 February and undated
   Includes:
   Research notes on the members of Walker’s party, undated.

Box-folder 1:4  Presidential proclamations on filibustering, 1854 January 18–December 4
   Includes:
   Transcription of President Franklin Pierce’s proclamations on filibustering, 1854.

Box-folder 1:5  Henry Crabb’s expedition and massacre, 1857–1908 and undated
   Includes:
   General research notes related to Crabb Expedition.
   Articles by John G. Capron, R. H. Forbes, James O’Meara and William MacLeod Raine on
   Crabb’s filibustering expedition.

Box-folder 1:6  International Company of Mexico’s Ensenada filibustering attempt, 1890 May 21-1907
   February 7 and undated
   Includes:
   Original correspondence from Walter Gifford Smith to Millard F. Hudson, February 7, 1907.