
Guide to the Robert Bliss Journal MS 79

Finding aid prepared by Lauren Rasmussen

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 15, 2012

Title: Robert Bliss Journal

Identifier/Call Number: MS 79

Contributing Institution: San Diego History Center Document Collection

Language of Material: English

Physical Description: 0.25 Linear feet(1 box)

Date (inclusive): 1846-1928

Abstract: This collection contains a journal written by Robert Stanton Bliss that records his activities as a private of Company B in the Mormon Battalion between 1846 and 1848, as well as correspondence related to the journal.

creator: Bliss, Robert Stanton

Processing Information

Collection processed by Lauren Rasmussen on June 15, 2012.

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Biographical / Historical Notes

The Mormon Battalion was the only religiously based unit in the history of the United States Army, serving from July 1846 to July 1847 during the Mexican-American War. A volunteer unit of roughly 550 Latter-day Saints men led by U.S. Army officers, the combat battalion made a 2,000 mile trek from Council Bluffs, Iowa to San Diego, California as reinforcements to the troops led by General Stephen Kearny. The Battalion left July 21, 1846 and arrived in San Diego 6 months later on January 29, 1847, completing the longest infantry march in military history. The arduous trek took them through hostile Indian territory, and the Battalion was consistently short on food and water. Of the original 550 men who left Council Bluffs, only 360 members reached San Diego.

Robert Stanton Bliss served as a private in B Company of the Mormon Battalion. He was born August 1, 1805 in Montville, Connecticut to Captain John Bliss and his wife, Lucretia. Bliss married Mary Anne Paine in 1833, with whom he had two children. In July of 1846, he enlisted in the Army, a month before the Mormon Battalion left on their journey. He would go on to complete the full 2,000 mile march and was discharged from military service on July 16, 1847. Bliss died in Cold Springs, California in 1851.

Arrangement

Items in the collection are arranged by subject.

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research. Access to journal is restricted to copy of original.

Conditions Governing Use

The San Diego History Center (SDHC) holds the copyright to any unpublished materials. SDHC Library regulations do apply.

Scope and Content

The journal in this collection covers the period between August 18, 1846, to January 13, 1848. The journal begins on August 18, 1846 with the Battalion already en route to Leavenworth, KS where they would spend two weeks organizing and gathering supplies. From there, they marched to Santa Fe, New Mexico and then on to the Colorado River by way of the Rio Grande. Bliss records daily entries of various lengths regarding their march in which he discusses his personal activities, work, and the changing landscape. The journal ends abruptly half way through an entry dated January 13, 1848. At this point, Bliss and his travel party had reached winter quarters in the Salt Lake Valley, but he has still not been reunited with his family as he had planned. A photocopy of the missing journal pages included in the collection completes the January 13th entry and ends on May 3, 1848.

The collection also includes correspondence dated 1915-1928 between Mary J. Clawson, Margaret Allen, and George Putnam regarding the journal and its missing pages. It might also be of interest that while it is not apparent in any of Bliss' journal entries, Putnam remarks to Clawson in his January 26, 1928 letter that he is glad to learn that Bliss was indeed reunited with his family.

Comments

In 1915 Mary Clawson was historian of the Daughters of the Mormon Battalion. Her father, Nathaniel V. Jones, served in Company B with Bliss. In 1915, Margaret Allen writes to Clawson on behalf of advisory board of the California Historical Society, requesting a copy of Bliss' journal to display in the 'Gallery of California History' at the Panama-California Exposition. Clawson agrees, and the portion of Bliss' journal currently held in this collection was sent after their exchange. Then in 1927, San Diego journalist and war veteran George I. Putnam inquires with Clawson again, and the two decide to exchange photocopies and transcripts of their respective portions of Bliss' journal. While the photocopied pages Putnam

received from Clawson are present in the collection (box 1, folder 5), the original copies of these pages are not included.

Preferred Citation

Robert Bliss Journal, MS 79, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements

The original journal (Box 1, folder 1) is very fragile and access is restricted to copy of the original only. Pages are brittle and detached from spine. Three small holes are on back cover. (June 15, 2012)

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Accession number 590622.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Allen, Margaret V.

Bliss, Robert Stanton

Clawson, Mary J.

Daughters of the Mormon Battalion.

Panama-California Exposition (1915 : San Diego, Calif.).

Panama-California International Exposition (1916 : San Diego, Calif.).

Pioneer Society of San Diego County.

Putnam, George I.

United States. Army. Mormon Battalion.

Verlasque, Louise

Council Bluffs (Iowa)

Diaries

History -- Societies, etc.

Los Angeles (Calif.)

Military history

Mormons

Salt Lake City (Utah)

San Diego (Calif.)

Santa Fe (N.M.)

Societies -- History, organization, etc.

Box-folder 1:1

Robert Bliss journal (original), 1846 August 18-1848 January 13

Entries of interest:

August 19, 1846: Bliss attends the funeral of Battalion Lieut. Col. James Allen who became ill and died shortly after the company left Council Bluffs, IA for Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

October 11, 1846: Company B passes through an "ancient city in ruins" roughly 20 miles north/northeast of Santa Fe, NM. At this time they were passing through the area that is now Pecos National Historical Park.

January 29, 1847: The Battalion arrives in San Diego and camps outside of town in a deserted mission station.

April 4, 1847: Bliss mentions that his family should be en route westward with other military personnel.

June 14, 1847: Company B celebrates the news of General Taylor's victory over 18,000 Spaniards.

July 16, 1847: Bliss and the soldiers of Company B are discharged from the U.S. Army in Los Angeles, CA.

August 1, 1847: Bliss notes his birthday. He is 42 years-old.

October 24, 1847: Bliss arrives in the Salt Lake Valley. A friend informs Bliss that his family is not there. He resigns himself to not being reunited with them until spring.

January 13, 1848: Last entry of the diary, which ends incomplete without explanation.

Box-folder 1:2 **Robert Bliss journal (copy), 1846 August 18-1848 January 13**
Box-folder 1:3 **Transcript of journal (2 copies), 1846 August 18-1848 January 13**
Box-folder 1:4 **Transcript of journal (bound copy), 1846 August 18-1848 January 13**
Box-folder 1:5 **Missing journal pages (copy), 1848 January 13-May 3**

Entry of interest:

March 6, 1848: Bliss begins his journey home.

Box-folder 1:6 **Correspondence (copies), 1915 October 18-January 1928 January 21**