
William Young Empey Papers: Finding Aid

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The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

Manuscripts Department

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Overview of the Collection

Title: William Young Empey Papers

Dates (inclusive): 1847-1890

Bulk dates: 1853-1854

Collection Number: mssHM 52583-52617

Creator: Empey, William Young, 1808-1890.

Extent: 307 pieces in 2 boxes

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Abstract: This collection chiefly contains records documenting the work of William Young Empey (1808-1890) in England and America as an agent of the Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF) of the Mormon Church, chiefly dating from the early 1850s. There are also letters relating to Empey's service as a missionary in England and to his personal affairs in later life.

Language: English.

Access

Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item]. William Young Empey Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Provenance

Purchased from Ida Terry Empey, 1945.

- This collection is related to the Mormon file, approximately 1805-1995.
- The Huntington holds photostatic copy of Empey's diary covering the period of his English mission: [William Young Empey diary: photocopy, 1852-1854](#). (Call number: mssFAC 517).

Biographical Note on William Empey

William Adam Empey (1808-1890) was born July 4, 1808 in modern-day Ontario Province, Canada. He returned to the United States, the birthplace of his parents and grandparents, sometime before the year 1844. Although the date and place of his conversion to Mormonism is not known, he became involved in the Mormon Church before the exodus from Nauvoo and was "sealed" to Brigham Young as an "adopted son". From this point on, he abandoned his first middle name and used "Young" quite frequently. In 1847, he participated in Brigham Young's pioneer expedition to the Great Salt Lake Valley. He never reached the Valley, however, for Young selected Empey and eight other members of the party to operate the first Mormon ferry at Upper Crossing on the North Platte River. After arriving in the Valley with a later emigrant party, he served on the Iron County Mission which settled Parowan in southern Utah. Then, in 1852, he was called to a mission in England, and from 1852 through 1854, William Young Empey played an important role in the operations of the PEF. During his two-year stint, while still preaching the Church's gospel abroad, he was ordered home to America and appointed to oversee all preparations of the overland parties in Missouri during the 1853-54 travel season.

Historical Note on the Perpetual Emigrating Fund

When the Utah territorial legislature incorporated the Perpetual Emigrating Company, more commonly known as the Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF), in 1850, the Mormon "gathering of Zion" entered a new phase. Although Mormon converts had often been encouraged to migrate from their present locations to join the main body of believers, little institutional support had been provided for them. With the establishment of the PEF, however, the Church committed itself to financing in part or in full the emigration of impoverished Saints converted by its increasingly successful overseas missions. Drawing in large measure upon the contributions of the members of the Church already settled in Utah, the PEF assisted nearly 10,000 Saints in emigrating to Zion just between 1852 and 1855. PEF agents, in cooperation with representatives of the

Church's British Mission, organized companies of emigrants early each year, funneling them through the English port of Liverpool and across the Atlantic on chartered steamers to New Orleans. From there, river steamers carried the emigrants and their supplies up the Mississippi to St. Louis and then up the Missouri to frontier communities such as Westport, the precursor of modern Kansas City, Missouri which served as the jumping-off points for overland wagon trains destined for the Great Salt Lake Valley. Other PEF agents in New Orleans, St. Louis and the Missouri frontier towns received this human cargo, ministered to their needs and forwarded them on to their next stop. These agents dealt with steamship lines, freighters and merchants throughout the Mississippi and Missouri river valleys, hiring transportation to carry their charges to the edge of the settlements and purchasing the enormous quantities of provisions and equipment necessary to outfit each overland party.

Bibliography

Empey's 1847 diary has been edited by Dale Morgan and published in *Annals of Wyoming*, Vol. 21, nos. 2-3 (July-Oct. 1949). The operation of the P. E. Fund and the process of Mormon emigration is described in Frederick Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (Liverpool and London, 1855), edited by James Linforth.

Scope and Content

The bulk of the papers consist of account books, passenger lists, and receipts documenting William Young Empey's work in England and America as an agent of the Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF) of the Mormon Church. There are also letters relating to Empey's service as a missionary in England and to his personal affairs in later life.

Among these papers, which concentrate primarily upon the years 1853 and 1854, are lists of PEF passengers on emigrant vessels from Liverpool, bills of landing and receipts for the purchase and shipment of many goods to equip the emigrant parties, and receipts and promissory notes from the emigrants themselves for wagons and teams or supplies purchased for them by the PEF's agent. These various documents illuminate many phases of the emigration process and the Church's careful, business-like organization of all the details.

Some notable items include William Empey's incomplete diary account of the pioneer expedition to the Salt Lake Valley and the operation of the North Platte ferry (HM 52586), Empey's account book including accounts kept for the PEF (HM 52587), an 1853 list of Danish Mormons who had provided money for the purchase of cattle, wagons and other material (HM 52599), lists of P. E. Fund passengers on board various ships sailing for the United States in 1854 (HM 52603, 52605-07 and 52610-11), and two letters from Samuel W. Richards to Empey discussing Mormon missionary work in Great Britain and emigration of the Saints to the United States (HM 52593 and 52597).

Arrangement

All items are filed chronologically in two boxes.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the [Huntington Library's Online Catalog](#).

Subjects

Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company.
Mormon Church -- Colonization -- West (U.S.)
Mormon Church -- Finance.
Mormon Church -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Mormons -- Emigration and immigration.
Mormons -- History -- 19th century -- Sources.
Mormons -- Missions -- Great Britain.
Ships -- England -- Liverpool -- Passenger lists.
West (U.S.) -- Emigration and immigration -- 19th century -- Sources.

Forms/Genres

Business records -- Utah -- 19th century.
Financial records -- Utah -- 19th century.
Personal papers -- Utah -- 19th century.

Alternate Authors

Richards, Samuel W. (Samuel Whitney), 1824-1909.

Box 1	1847-1854 April 13
Box 2	1854 April 24-1890 December 19