Overview of the Collection

Title: Carleton E. Watkins Mammoth Plate Photographs of Yosemite, New Almaden Mine and the Mendocino Coast, California

Dates (inclusive): 1863-1864; negatives 1861, 1863

Collection Number(s): 379010

Creator: Watkins, Carleton E., 1829-1916

Extent: 50 mammoth plate photographs in 2 volumes (disbound): albumen prints; size of prints varies, approximately 40 x 53 cm. (15 3/4 x 20 3/4 in.); volumes each 53 x 67 cm. (21 x 26 1/2 in.)

Repository: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Photo Archives

1151 Oxford Road
San Marino, California 91108
Phone: (626) 405-2191
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URL: http://www.huntington.org

Abstract: A collection of 50 mammoth plate photographs of Yosemite, the New Almaden Mine, and Mendocino, California by American photographer Carleton E. Watkins (1829-1916). The prints were in a two-volume set, now disbound, containing a title page dated 1863 and a dedication page reading: "To Ernest Frignet / His California Friends / April 1864." The photographs are landscape views of Yosemite and the Mariposa giant sequoias, taken by Watkins in 1861, followed by 1863 views of New Almaden Quicksilver Mine and Mendocino, both in Northern California.

Language: English.

Access

Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. Due to the large size and fragility of the photographs, access is granted only by permission of the Curator of Photographs. For more information, contact Reader Services.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Collection of Carleton E. Watkins Mammoth Plate Photographs of Yosemite, New Almaden Mine and the Mendocino Coast, California, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Provenance

Purchased by the Friends of the Huntington Library from Pierre Berès, Inc., April 1, 1950.

Biographical Note

Carleton E. Watkins (1829-1916) was born in 1829 in Oneonta, New York. In 1851, he migrated to Sacramento, California in the company of businessman Collis P. Huntington and several other residents of Oneonta. He began his photographic career as an apprentice to established San Francisco Bay area studio photographers Robert H. Vance (1825–1876) and James May Ford (c. 1827–1877).

Watkins photographed Yosemite for the first time in 1861. His large-scale images inspired President Abraham Lincoln and the United States Congress to declare Yosemite the nation’s first national preserve in 1864. By the end of the American Civil War, the photographer had become one of the medium’s leading lights, winning prestigious commissions and international awards.

Over the course of his career, Watkins operated studios at various Montgomery Street addresses in San Francisco. Around 1869, he purchased Alfred A. Hart’s stereographic negatives documenting the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad. Watkins subsequently published Hart’s negatives under the series title: “Watkins Central Pacific Railroad.”

Watkins suffered severe financial reverses in 1875, losing his negative inventory to competitor Isaiah H. Taber. From that point onward, Watkins published negatives under the “New Series” heading.

In 1879, Watkins married Frances Henrietta Sneed. The couple had two children, Julia (1881–1977) and Collis (1883–1965). By the early 1890s, declining health forced Watkins to curtail his activities. He took his last major commission in 1894, photographing the Phoebe Apperson Hearst residence, Hacienda del Pozo de Verona, in Pleasanton, California. The earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed Watkins’ San Francisco studio and its contents. Shortly thereafter, he entered the Napa State Asylum for the Insane in Napa, California, where he died in 1916.
Scope and Content
This collection contains 50 mammoth plate, albumen photographs made in 1861 and 1863 by Carleton E. Watkins (1829-1916), depicting Yosemite, the New Almaden Quicksilver Mine, and Mendocino, California. The prints are all signed by Watkins and were originally bound in two volumes, now disbound. The first volume begins with a title page dated 1863 and a dedication page reading: “To Ernest Frignet / His California Friends / April 1864.”
The photographs are in three series, each with a title page in elaborate calligraphy by Fulgenzio Seregni:

Vol. 1
Yo-semite Valley / Photographic Views of the Falls and Valley of Yo-semite in Mariposa County, California (30 prints, negatives 1861)

Vol. 2
New Almaden Quicksilver Mine (8 prints, negatives 1863)
Mendocino Coast Views (12 prints, negatives 1863)

(See descriptions and lists of photographs in Collection Contents, below.)
Ernest Frignet (b. 1823), dedicatee, wrote several books and articles on California and the West that published in France, most notably “La Californie, histoire, organisation politique et administrative, législation, description physique et géologique. Agriculture—industrie—commerce,” (Paris, 1866). The “California Friends” who presented him with the photographs are unidentified.
The title pages are in decorative calligraphy by Fulgenzio Seregni, a native of Milan, Italy who came to California in 1858. He established himself in San Francisco, where he taught drawing and writing in public schools and colleges, and later became a well-known designer of marble monuments.
In addition to Watkins’ signature, each print has a handwritten title in the style of calligrapher Seregni, on the mount below the print. The top corners of the prints are rounded or “dome-topped,” a practice used to eliminate darkened corners caused by early camera lenses.
The volumes were bound by noted French bookbinder Léon Gruel (1841-1923), who operated a renowned bindery in Paris. The first leaf of each volume is stamped “GRUEL.”

Sources consulted
Green, Tyler. Carleton Watkins: Making the West American (University of California Press, 2018)
Palmquist, Peter E. Carleton E. Watkins: Photographer of the American West (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983)

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Huntington Library’s Online Catalog:

Subjects
Clark, Galen, 1814-1910 -- Photographs.
Giant sequoia -- California -- Photographs.
Frontier and pioneer life -- West (U.S.) -- Photographs.
Landscapes -- California -- Photographs.
Trees -- California -- Photographs.
Mercury mines and mining -- California -- New Almaden -- Photographs.
Mining camps -- California -- New Almaden -- Photographs.

Carleton E. Watkins Mammoth Plate Photographs of Yosemite, New Almaden Mine and ...
[Vol. 1] Yo-semite Valley / Photographic Views of the Falls and Valley of Yo-semite in Mariposa County, California, [negatives 1861]

Creator: Carleton E. Watkins, photographer

Physical Description: (Disbound) title page, dedication page, and 30 photographs (Vol. 1, plates 1 - 30).

Scope and Content Note

Watkins made these photographs in Yosemite in 1861, with a camera he made himself to hold glass plate negatives measuring 18 x 22 inches, which was the largest size ever used at that time. The photographs are scenic landscape views of Yosemite Valley, including rivers, waterfalls, massive granite cliffs and boulders, and giant sequoia trees in the Mariposa Grove. One view depicts naturalist Galen Clark (1814-1910) standing in front of the ancient sequoia called Grizzly Giant.

Note on contents list:

All titles are transcribed from the item. Watkins’ numbers and dates of photographs are from the catalog raisonné by Weston Naef and Christine Hult-Lewis, *Carleton Watkins: The Complete Mammoth Photographs* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum), 2011.(Cited below as Naef.)

Box 1
Volume 1 -- Original album covers and end pages

Physical Description: This box contains only the original leather covers and end pages of volume 1. Note that for this volume only, boards were adhered to the covers to form a portfolio box by Huntington Library conservators, approximately 1970s.

Box 2

Volume 1 -- Title and dedication pages; Plates 1-9

Vol. 1, Leaf 1

Title page in decorative calligraphy reading: Yo-semite Valley / Photographic Views of the Falls and Valley of Yo-semite in Mariposa County, California / Executed by C. E. Watkins of San Francisco / San Francisco, California / 1863

Note

Written below title: “Executed by Fulgenzio Seregni, Professor of Penmanship and Drawing / No. 606 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, California.” Includes the state seal of California.

Vol. 1, Leaf 2

Dedication page reading: “To Ernest Frignet / His California Friends / April 1864”

Vol. 1, Plate 1

View on the Merced [1861]

Watkins no. 41. Image size: 15 3/8 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 146.

Vol. 1, Plate 2

The Lake [1861]

Watkins no. 72. Image size: 15 7/8 x 20 7/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 232.

Vol. 1, Plate 3

Cathedral Rock [1861]

Watkins no. 20. Image size: 16 1/4 x 20 1/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 155.

Vol. 1, Plate 4

Yo Semite Fall (Lower view) 2630 ft. [1861]

Watkins no. 49. Image size: 15 5/8 x 20 3/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 194.
Vol. 1, Plate 5

**Camp Grove [1861]**

Watkins no. 45. Image size: 15 5/8 x 20 5/8 inches  
Note: Naef no. 211.

Vol. 1, Plate 6

**The Three Brothers 4480 ft. [1861]**

Watkins no. 27. Image size: 15 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches  
Note: Naef no. 168.

Vol. 1, Plate 7

**River View Cathedral Rock [1861]**

Watkins no. 31. Image size: 15 3/4 x 20 7/8 inches  
Note: Naef no. 152.

Vol. 1, Plate 8

**Yo Semite Falls (Upper View) [1861]**

Watkins no. 53. Image size: 16 1/4 x 20 3/4 inches  
Note: Naef no. 196.

Vol. 1, Plate 9

**El Capitan (near view) 3600 ft. [1861]**

Watkins no. 25. Image size: 20 1/2 x 16 inches  
Note: Naef no. 132.

Box 3

**Volume 1 -- Plates 10-20**

Vol. 1, Plate 10

**Grizzly Giant Mariposa Grove 33 ft. diam. [1861]**

Watkins no. 111. Image size: 15 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches  
Note: Naef no. 103. Galen Clark standing at base of tree.

Vol. 1, Plate 11

**Nevada Fall 700 ft. [1861]**

Watkins no. 90. Image size: 16 x 20 3/4 inches  
Note: Naef no. 245.
Vol. 1, Plate 12

*The Half Dome* 4967 ft. [1861]

Watkins no. 61. Image size: 15 1/4 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 218.

Vol. 1, Plate 13

*Sentinel (View up the Valley)* 3270 ft. [1861]

Watkins no. 32. Image size: 20 1/8 x 16 1/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 181.

Vol. 1, Plate 14

*View up the Valley* [1861]

Watkins no. 9. Image size: 15 3/8 x 20 1/2 inches
Note: Naef no. 187.

Vol. 1, Plate 15

*Bridal Veil Fall* [1861]

Watkins no. 15. Image size: 16 1/8 x 20 3/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 137.

Vol. 1, Plate 16

*North Dome* 3729 ft. [1861]

Watkins no. 84. Image size: 16 x 20 3/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 236.

Vol. 1, Plate 17

*Three Brothers (front view)* 4480 ft. [1861]

Watkins no. 34. Image size: 16 1/4 x 20 1/2 inches
Note: Naef no. 175.

Vol. 1, Plate 18

*Sentinel (front view)* 3270 ft. [1861]

Watkins no. 44. Image size: 16 1/4 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 184.

Vol. 1, Plate 19

*El Capitan* 3600 ft. [1861]
Vol. 1, Plate 20

**Outline of the Half Dome. 4967 ft. [1861]**

Watkins no. 83. Image size: 15 3/4 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 223.

Vol. 1, Plate 21

**Grizzly Giant (Mariposa Grove) 33 ft. diam. [1861]**

Watkins no. 112. Image size: 15 7/8 x 20 3/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 101.

Vol. 1, Plate 22

**Mount Broderick. Nevada Fall. [1861]**

Watkins no. 89. Image size: 20 3/4 x 15 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 242.

Vol. 1, Plate 23

**The Cascade [1861]**

Watkins no. 91. Image size: 21 x 15 3/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 246.

Vol. 1, Plate 24

**North Dome. Royal Arches. Washington Column. [1861]**

Watkins no. 79. Image size: 20 3/4 x 16 7/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 228.

Vol. 1, Plate 25

**View from Camp Grove [1861]**

Watkins no. 47. Image size: 15 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 145.

Vol. 1, Plate 26

**Sentinel (View down the Valley) [1861]**

Carleton E. Watkins Mammoth Plate Photographs of Yosemite, New Almaden Mine and ...
Vol. 1, Plate 27

*Cathedral Spires [1861]*

Watkins no. 24. Image size: 16 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 164.

Vol. 1, Plate 28

*River View down the Valley [1861]*

Watkins no. 11. Image size: 20 3/4 x 15 3/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 148.

Vol. 1, Plate 29

*Vernal Fall. 300 ft. [1861]*

Watkins no. 87. Image size: 20 5/8 x 15 3/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 239.

Vol. 1, Plate 30

*Yo-Semite Falls (front view) 2630 ft. [1861]*

Watkins no. 50. Image size: 20 5/8 x 15 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 195.

[Vol. 2] *New Almaden Quicksilver Mine, [negatives 1863]*

Creator: Carleton E. Watkins, photographer

Physical Description: (Disbound) title page and 8 photographs (Vol. 2, plates 1 - 8)

Scope and Content Note

In 1863, Watkins was commissioned to photograph the New Almaden Quicksilver Mine near San Jose, California, by William Eustace Barron, a founding partner and San Francisco merchant. This group of 8 mammoth plate photographs depict the structures and works of the quicksilver (i.e. mercury) mine set among hillsides, including smelting furnaces, metal sheds, and paths leading to mine entrances. One view depicts about 40 workers at a quarry, including several adolescent boys posed with wheelbarrows. The miners’ community of small houses and wooden shacks is also seen in views titled “Hacienda” and “The Town on the Hill.”

Note on contents list:

All titles are transcribed from the item. Watkins’ numbers and dates of photographs are from the catalog raisonné by Weston Naef and Christine Hult-Lewis, *Carleton Watkins: The Complete Mammoth Photographs* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum), 2011.(Cited below as Naef.)
Volume 2 -- Original album covers and end pages

Physical Description: This box contains only the original leather covers and end pages of volume 2.

Box 6

Volume 2 -- "New Almaden" title page; Plates 1-8

Vol. 2, Leaf 1

Title page: New Almaden Quicksilver Mine

Note

Calligraphy signed "F. Seregni. San Francisco."

Vol. 2, Plate 1

General view of smelting works [1863]

Watkins no. 130. Image size: 15 7/8 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 86.

Vol. 2, Plate 2

The new Fornaces [i.e. Furnaces] [1863]

Watkins no. 126. Image size: 15 1/8 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 82.

Vol. 2, Plate 3

The Metal Shed [1863]

Watkins no. 140. Image size: 15 1/4 x 20 1/2 inches
Note: Naef no. 96.

Vol. 2, Plate 4

The Mine Peak [1863]

Watkins no. 139. Image size: 15 3/4 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 91.

Vol. 2, Plate 5

The Hacienda (View East) [1863]

Watkins no. 129. Image size: 15 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 85.
Vol. 2, Plate 6

The Town on the Hill [1863]

Watkins no. 134. Image size: 15 1/2 x 20 1/2 inches
Note: Naef no. 90. A sign can be seen on a wooden storefront reading "Bakery. Panaderia. de Larrecl[e?]"

Vol. 2, Plate 7

The smelting works and Mine [1863]

Watkins no. 127. Image size: 15 5/8 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 83.

Vol. 2, Plate 8

Street view at the Aciende [i.e. Hacienda] [1863]

Watkins no. 123. Image size: 15 1/2 x 20 1/2 inches
Note: Naef no. 79.

Vol. 2] Mendocino Coast Views, [negatives 1863]

Creator: Carleton E. Watkins, photographer

Physical Description: (Disbound) title page and 12 photographs (Vol. 2, plates 9 - 20)
Scope and Content Note
Watkins made these photographs in the fall of 1863, most likely on a commission from Jerome B. Ford, a major mill owner in Mendocino, California (Palmquist, p. 22). Views show lumber mills along the banks of Big River, Albion River, and Noyo River, near where they meet the Pacific Ocean. The coastal city of Mendocino is seen on top of a high beach cliff, and there are scenic views of ocean waves crashing against boulders. One river view shows men guiding a small ferry by holding a cable mounted across the river, and a log flume is seen suspended in the background. There is one view of Native Americans, possibly Pomo, seated in front of dwellings made from wooden planks. The house of “Mr. Chalfant” in the town, with a fenced yard, is the focus of another photograph, and there is one view of the Fort Bragg army post.

Note on contents list:
All titles are transcribed from the item. Watkins’ numbers and dates of photographs are from the catalog raisonné by Weston Naef and Christine Hult-Lewis, Carleton Watkins: The Complete Mammoth Photographs (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum), 2011.(Cited below as Naef.)

Box 6

Volume 2 -- “Mendocino” title page

Vol. 2, Leaf 2

Title page: Mendocino Coast Views

Note

Calligraphy signed “F. Seregni, San Francisco, California.”
Box 6-1

Volume 2 -- Plate 9

Vol. 2, Plate 9

Cottage of Mr. Chalfant [1863]

Note: Naef no. 380.

Box 7

Volume 2 -- Plates 10-20

Vol. 2, Plate 10

Garrison at Fort Bragg [1863]

Watkins no. 207. Image size: 15 3/8 x 20 1/2 inches
Note: Naef no. 433.

Vol. 2, Plate 11

Big River Mill [1863]

Watkins no. 167. Image size: 15 1/8 x 19 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 396.

Vol. 2, Plate 12

The Albion [1863]

Watkins no. 153. Image size: 15 1/2 x 20 1/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 419. View of Albion River and lumber mill.

Vol. 2, Plate 13

The Noyo Mill [1863]

Watkins no. 205. Image size: 15 7/8 x 20 1/2 inches
Note: Naef no. 432.

Vol. 2, Plate 14

The City of Big River [1863]

Watkins no. 182. Image size: 15 1/8 x 20 1/4 inches
Note: Naef no. 385. View of Mendocino.

Vol. 2, Plate 15

The Rancherie. (Big River) [1863]
Vol. 2, Plate 16

*Noyo River* [1863]

Note: Naef no. 429. View includes a small ferry guided by cable across river, and a log flume.

Vol. 2, Plate 17

*Big River Harbour* [1863]

Watkins no. 169. Image size: 14 1/2 x 20 5/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 398.

Vol. 2, Plate 18

*Noyo Bay* [1863]

Note: Naef no. 425.

Vol. 2, Plate 19

*Big River* [1863]

Note: Naef no. 399.

Vol. 2, Plate 20

*Coast View (from the Albion River)* [1863]

Watkins no. 158. Image size: 14 7/8 x 19 7/8 inches
Note: Naef no. 412.