Finding Aid for the Cave Johnson Couts [Diary], 1849

Cataloged by Citlali Sosa-Riddell, with assistance from Laurel McPhee; machine-readable finding aid created by Caroline Cubé.

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Cave Johnson Couts [Diary]
Date (inclusive): 1849
Collection number: 170/101
Creator: Couts, Cave Johnson, 1821-1874
Extent: 169 leaves : paper ; 25 x 20 cm.
Abstract: A complete photographic copy of Cave Johnson Couts' diary, which includes descriptions of his experience at West Point, his military service as an officer of the 1st U.S. Dragoons on the Western frontier and in Mexico, and as an escort for the Whipple Expedition from San Diego to the Colorado River.
Language: Finding aid is written in English.
Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. Library Special Collections.
Los Angeles, California 90095-1575
Physical location: Stored off-site at SRLF. Advance notice is required for access to the collection. Please contact the UCLA Library Special Collections Reference Desk for paging information.

Restrictions on Access
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Processing Note
Cataloged by Citlali Sosa-Riddell, with assistance from Laurel McPhee, in the Center For Primary Research and Training (CFPRT).

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Cave Johnson Couts [Diary] (Collection 170/101). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.

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Biography
Cave Johnson Couts was born near Springfield, Tennessee on November 11, 1821. His uncle, Cave Johnson, had him appointed to West Point, where he graduated in 1843. He served on the frontier until after the Mexican War, when he was stationed in Los Angeles, San Luis Rey, and San Diego from 1848 to 1851. In 1849 he conducted the Whipple expedition to the Colorado River.

On April 5, 1851, he married Ysidora Bandini, daughter of Juan Bandini of San Diego. In October of the same year he resigned from the army and was soon after appointed colonel and aid-de-camp on the staff of Governor Bigler. In 1853 he moved to a tract known as the Guajome grant, a wedding gift to his wife from her brother-in-law, Abel Stearns. Having been appointed sub-agent for the San Luis Rey Indians, Colonel Couts was able to secure all the cheap labor needed for the improvement of his property. His business affairs were managed with skill and military precision, and he became one of the wealthiest men in Southern California. He purchased the San Marcos, Buena Vista, and La Jolla ranchos, and also government land, amounting in all to about 20,000 acres. As Colonel Couts' wealth consisted largely of cattle, the passage of the "no fence" law was a severe blow to him, and one from which he never fully recovered. He died at the Horton House in San Diego, June 10 1874.

Scope and Content
Cave Johnson Couts's diary begins on September 1, 1846 and ends approximately on November 2, 1849, and includes two sketched maps. The first entries describe his final year at West Point and his early military commitments as an officer in the 1st U.S. Dragoons. He travels to Washita, Natchitoches, Fort Jesup, and Evansville, and records the daily events in his life at the time, which include social and family visits, weddings, and courting young ladies. The next part of the diary includes the march from Monterrey, Mexico to Sacramento in 1848 following the Mexican War, under General Wool. Couts describes the people, events, places, and terrain that he encounters in the Mexican states of Coahuila, Durango, Chihuahua, and Nuevo Leon. Upon reaching California, Couts is stationed in San Diego, Los Angeles and the San Luis Rey Mission, where he visits...
the old missions and inspects them for the United States government.

After his brief stay in California, Couts joins Amiel W. Whipple's Boundary Commission expedition to define the new border between Mexico and the United States. He provides the military escort all the way to the mouth of the Gila and Colorado Rivers. Here, the diary entries describe conflicts and friendship with Native Americans such as the Maricopas, Yumas, and Quechans. He also describes the groups of Mexicans from Sonora and Americans from the East, who were heading West in search of gold, often without proper provisions or supplies. The diary's conclusion focuses on the expedition's encampment on the Colorado and Gila Rivers, named Camp Calhoun. Incidentally, the location of the camp was deemed to be the only passable part of the Colorado River; it became known as Yuma Pass, and was well-traveled by migrants into California.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects
Whipple, Amiel Weeks, 1817-1863.
Discoveries in geography--American.
United States--Discovery and exploration.
United States. Army--Military life.
Southwest, New--Description and travel.
Gila River, Ariz.
United States--Boundaries--Mexico.
Mexico--Boundaries--United States.

Genres and Forms of Material
Manuscripts.

Related Material
Bound Manuscripts Collection (Collection 170) . Available at UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.
Original manuscript: Cave Johnson Couts Diary, UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library.

ff. [1-2]: Sketch maps, showing the route from Santa Maria to the Vallecito “by way of Warner’s Ranch,” and the route from the Colorado River to the Carrigo
ff. 3-13: Reflections on West Point and daily life from Dragoon Camp, Evansville, Ark. 1846 September 1
ff. 13-15: Fort Gibson, Oklahoma 1846 October 20
ff. 15: March to Monterrey, Mexico 1848 January 10 to 1848 June 28
ff. 16-31: March from Monterrey to Chihuahua, Mexico under General Wool 1848 June
ff. 32-39: Stationed in Chihuahua late summer 1848
ff. 39-117: March from Chihuahua to California 1848 September 1
ff. 117-128: Arrived in Los Angeles, marched to the San Luis Rey Mission, and to the San Diego Mission 1849 January 8 to 1849 September 11
ff. 128-167: Joined Whipple’s Boundary Commission and marched to the mouth of the Gila and Colorado Rivers (eastern Arizona), and made camp there to explore the area for the future border between the U.S. and Mexico 1859 September and December.