Photograph albums documenting diversion of the Colorado River and creation of the Salton Sea, 1900-1911

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Title: Photograph albums documenting diversion of the Colorado River and creation of the Salton Sea
Collection number: 94/1
Contributing Institution: UCLA Library Special Collections
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 2 albums(1147 photographic prints on 371 leaves) : b&w, cyanotype ; 26 x 38 cm (albums)
Date (inclusive): 1900-1911
Abstract: Two albums of photographs documenting the California Development Company's project to construct a system of canals to divert water from the Colorado River for irrigation of the Imperial Valley, the subsequent breaks in the levees, and the flooding between 1905 and 1907 of the Salton Basin which resulted in the creation of the Salton Sea.
Physical location: Stored off-site at SRLF. All requests to access special collections materials must be made in advance through our electronic paging system using the request button located on this page.

http://calisphere.org/collections/26934/

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Photograph albums documenting diversion of the Colorado River and creation of the Salton Sea (Collection 94/1). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

UCLA Catalog Record ID
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Biography/History
The California Development Company was formed in 1896 by Charles R. Rockwood, who planned to convert the Imperial Valley desert into an agricultural oasis. Between 1900 and 1902, canals were constructed under the supervision of George Chaffey, water flowed into the Valley regulated by a wooden head gate, and thousands of new settlers arrived, and began cultivating fruits and vegetables. However, the waters of the Colorado River contained large amounts of silt, which soon interfered with delivery of irrigation to farmers, and blocked the head gate. Financially strapped, and unable to buy dredges to unclog the canals, the California Development Company began cutting a new intake from the river in summer 1904 at an unregulated point four miles south of the U.S.-Mexican border, even though they had no authority to construct a control gate there. The Colorado River flooded three times during the winter of 1905, and by March waters had broken through the dikes and were pouring into the Salton Basin at a rate of 90,000 cubic feet per second. Valuable farmland was washed away, part of the Inter-California Railroad was under water, the towns of Calexico and Mexicali were in jeopardy, and the Southern Pacific Railroad's main line from Los Angeles to Yuma was threatened. During the next two years, the Company made five attempts to control the river with no success. Finally the Southern Pacific Railroad, under the direction of E.H. Harriman, intervened in April 1906, loaning the Development Company more than $1 million, and bringing in civil engineer Epes Randolph to oversee the repair of the levees. The breach was not finally closed until January 1907.

Scope and Content
Photographs in Box 1, dated between 1900 and 1906, are divided into five sections, each with separate cover leaf bearing a typed title label: "California Development Company irrigation works before 1906, the resulting agricultural and village development, and of the agricultural and horticultural development in the adjacent Yuma Valley," shows hunting parties and mud volcanoes in the Valley before irrigation, early canal construction in 1900-1902, and subsequent cultivation of date and fig orchards, vineyards, alfalfa and corn fields, orange groves, and fields of tomatoes, cantaloupes, asparagus, and onions. There are also views of early Calexico, founded in 1900 as a tent city for workers on the Alamo Canal; farms in the Yuma Valley, and Yuma Indian families. Section 2 documents the intake canals, the "break", and efforts during 1904-1905 to close the breach; Section 3 shows construction of the Rockwood Headgate, attempts to divert water through it, and its failure, Jan.-Oct. 1906; Section 4 contains views of the effects of flooding in the Imperial Valley into the Salton Sea, Dec. 1905-March 1907; and Section 5 shows construction and operation of the concrete headgate at Hanlons, Calif. at the head of the Imperial Canal, Jan. 1906-July 1908. In addition to the photos, Box 1 contains a detailed map (36 x 28 cm) of the Colorado Delta and Imperial Valley; and a booklet of photos (14 x 22 cm) taken by James D. Schuyler, July 16, 1906,
of the concrete headgate at Hanlons, and the wooden gate at the Lower Mexican Intake. Box 2 documents repair
operations conducted under the auspices of Epes Randolph, agent of the Southern Pacific Railroad, beginning in July 1906,
with photographs arranged in six sections. Section 1 contains photos of the construction of the Hind Dam (named after T.J.
Hind, superintendent of the work at the Lower Heading), and dredging by dredges "Alpha" and "Delta," which closed the
breach in Nov. 1906. But floods caused a second break in Dec. 1906, and the photos in Sections 2 and 3 document the
re-construction during Dec 1906 and Jan 1907 of the Hind Dam, now known as the Clarke Dam, after C.K. Clarke,
superintendent of the second closing. There are views of the work crews, Indian boatmen, Indian laborers, constructing
levies, quarrying rock for riprapping (filling in water with loose rock as a foundation), trestle building, transporting pilings,
repairing track, and crossing the water in an aerial cable car. There are also photos of the Colorado River steamboats
"Searchlight" and "St. Vallier." Section 4 contains photos of reconstruction of levees before the second break, and
completion of the levee system along the Colorado River Dec. 1906-July 1907. Section 5 documents rehabilitation,
extension and improvement of the Imperial Valley irrigation system, March 1906-Dec. 1909; and maintenance and
extension of the levee protection works July-Dec 1907. Section 6 contains views (some cyanotypes) of Colorado River
control work, Jan.-May 1911, under direction of Col. John A. Ockerson.

Related Material
Removed from Cory family papers 1896-1932, for separate cataloging as part of the Photograph Album Collection (Collection 94) in UCLA Library Special Collections.
Copies of some of these images are in the UCLA Library Special Collections Photo Negative collection.
For a complete and detailed history, with maps, plans, and illustrations, of the California Development Company's project to
divert waters of the Colorado River to develop and irrigate the Imperial Valley, cf. H.T. Cory, "Irrigation and River Control in
the Colorado River Delta," Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers 76 (1913): 1204-1571. Many of the
photos and one of the maps from the albums are reprinted in Cory's article. Additional information on H.T. Cory available in
Cory family papers (Collection 665).

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Alpha (Dredge) --Photographs.
California Development Company.
Clarke, C.K.
Cory family papers.
Cory, H. T. (Harry Thomas), b. 1870.
Delta (Dredge) --Photographs.
Hind, T.J. (Thomas J.)
Ockerson, J. A. (John Augustus), 1848-1924.
Randolph, Epes, 1856-1921.
Schuyler, James D. (James Dix), 1848-1912.
Searchlight (Steamboat) --Photographs.
Southern Pacific Railroad Company --Photographs.
St. Vallier (Steamboat) --Photographs.
Aerial tramways --California --Brawley --Photographs.
Brawley (Calif.) --Photographs.
Calexico (Calif.) --Photographs.
Colorado River Delta (Mexico) --Photographs.
Cyanotypes.
Dredges --California --Photographs.
Dredges --Mexico --Photographs.
Flumes --Colorado River Valley (Colo.-Mexico) --Photographs.
Hanlons (Calif.) --Photographs.
Imperial (Calif.) --Photographs.
Imperial Valley (Calif. and Mexico)
Irrigation --Imperial Valley (Calif. and Mexico) --Photographs.
Laguna Dam (Ariz.) --Photographs.
Levees --Colorado River Valley (Colo.-Mexico) --Photographs.
Mexicali (Mexico) --Photographs.
Mud volcanoes --Imperial Valley (Calif. and Mexico) --Photographs.
Photograph albums.
Photographic prints.
Salton Sea (Calif.) --Photographs.
Steamboats --California --Photographs.
Steamboats --Mexico --Photographs.
Water resources development --Southwest, New --Photographs.
Water-supply --Colorado River Valley (Colo.-Mexico) --Photographs.
Water-supply --Imperial Valley (Calif. and Mexico) --Photographs.
Yuma (Ariz.) --Photographs.
Yuma Indians --California --Photographs.