Preliminary Guide to the John Wesley Thomas / China Relief Expedition Collection

Processed by Special Collections staff; latest revision, D. Tambo and E. Fields
Department of Special Collections
Davidson Library
University of California, Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, CA 93106
Phone: (805) 893-3062
Fax: (805) 893-5749
Email: special@library.ucsb.edu
URL: http://www.library.ucsb.edu/speccoll/speccoll.html
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Preliminary Guide to the John Wesley Thomas / China Relief Expedition Collection, ca. 1900-1943

Collection number: Wyles Mss 60

Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara

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David C. Gartrell

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Descriptive Summary

Title: John Wesley Thomas / China Relief Expedition Collection,

Date (inclusive): ca. 1900-1943

Date (bulk): (bulk 1900-1901)

Collection Number: Wyles Mss 60

Creator: Thomas, John Wesley

Extent: .4 linear feet (1 document box)

Repository: University of California, Santa Barbara. Library. Department of Special Collections

Physical Location: Del Sur

Language: English.

Access Restrictions

None.

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

Gift of Mrs. Margaret Holley, 1987.

Biography
John Wesley Thomas was born in Decatur, Illinois ca. 1869, and enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1899. He served in Company B of the Ninth Regiment of Infantry, as part of the China Relief Expedition of 1900, and was honorably discharged in 1902. His discharge papers list his occupation as embalmer and indicate he was transported back to the U.S., via Japan, in 1903.

The following historical note is largely derived from:


(These also provide further references under the heading ‘Boxer Uprising/Boxer Rebellion’).

A popular movement that developed in North China, the Boxer Rebellion was directed against both Manchu and foreigners, especially missionaries. The Boxers (from the Chinese *Yihequan* (I-ho-ch’üan), or ‘Fists of Righteous Indignation’) began to organize as a secret society to oppose extortion by local officials of the Manchu dynasty. They practiced traditional Chinese martial arts and believed that they could not be harmed by the bullets of foreigners. The groups grew more militant and more antiforeign until, by spring 1900, Boxer groups drifted toward Beijing (Peking), attacking Chinese Christians and European citizens. The Boxers then began what was to be a fifty-five day siege of foreign legations in Peking. The end of this uprising was both swift and tragic. Armies from seven foreign powers (German forces arrived later) entered the capital and had begun wreaking a terrible revenge.

On August 4, 1900, a combined column of foreign expeditionary forces started to fight their way to Beijing. The U.S. Ninth Infantry earned its nickname, ‘the Manchus,’ in this action. The foreign relief force arrived in Beijing on August 14, 1900. The forces razed the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, and the Empress Cixi’s (Tz’u-hsi) villas in the Fragrant Hills west of the city. German troops conducted another punitive campaign until the Boxer protocol was signed in September 1901.

Histories of the People’s Republic of China usually refer to the Boxer Rebellion foreign relief force as the ‘Eight Foreign Armies Invasion of China.’

The Boxer Protocol that officially marked the end of the uprising was signed by officials of the Chinese government and the representatives of some eleven foreign powers on September 7, 1901. Included in the document were provisions for the punishment of those considered most responsible for the rebellion; some 67 million pounds in indemnity; the stationing of foreign troops in China; and the suspension of civil service examination in forty-five cities for a period of five years. Military occupation and interruption of the traditional examination system played an extremely significant role in the Chinese revolution of the twentieth century. The first served as a constant reminder of China’s humiliation, and the second caused China’s elite to look elsewhere for ways to assist their country in its time of need.

**Other Sources of Information**

- Waite, Carleton Frederick, *Some Elements of International Military Co-operation in the Suppression of the 1900 Antiforeign Rising in China With Special Reference to the Forces of the United States*, Los Angeles, USC Press, 1935. (Wyles, DS 771 W3)

**Scope and Content of Collection**

The collection primarily contains black and white photographs of Peking, China during the time of the Boxer Rebellion, some with handwritten inscriptions, ca. 1900-1901, as well as 1 map of Peking, 1 identification card, and a copy of Thomas’ discharge papers. The photographs include portraits and group shots of a number of 9 U.S. Infantry soldiers, Peking scenes, as well as some very graphic images of executions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1: 1 - 13</th>
<th>Photographs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 1 - 12</td>
<td>Boxer Rebellion / Peking (Beijing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 1</td>
<td>Buildings and Monuments (6 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 2</td>
<td>Ch’ien Men (Qianmen) Gate after the capture of Peking (2 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 3</td>
<td>Executions (3 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 4</td>
<td>Gate of Great Purity, Peking (2 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 5</td>
<td>Grand Canal and Bridges (4 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 6</td>
<td>Imperial Palace (5 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 7</td>
<td>Imperial Troops (2 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 8</td>
<td>9th U.S. Infantry in Peking - includes commercial portraits of soldiers as well as snapshots and one group photo, with John Thomas identified (25 images), ca. 1900-1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 9</td>
<td>Portraits -- Chinese and Japanese (7 images), ca. 1900-1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 10</td>
<td>Shops and Patrons, Peking (5 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 11</td>
<td>Street Scenes (3 images), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 12</td>
<td>Temple of Heaven (1 image), ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 13</td>
<td>Thomas, John Wesley, 1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 14</td>
<td>Map of Peking -- printed, from Harper's Weekly, ca. 1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1: 15</td>
<td>Miscellany -- includes copy of discharge papers, 1902-1903, and a card identifying Thomas as a 'Mandarin' of the Imperial Order of the Dragon, a distinction for having served with the China Relief Expedition of 1900, n.d.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>