

Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) Collection, 1890-1915

P-004

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) Collection, 1890-1915

Dates: 1890-1915

Collection Number: P-004

Creator/Collector: Forbes, Andrew Alexander (1862-1921)

Extent: 10 linear feet (Boxes: letter, ½ letter, 4 ov)

Repository: Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Abstract: Andrew Alexander Forbes was the first resident photographer in the Owens Valley area of California. He maintained a commercial photo studio in Bishop from 1902 to 1916. In addition, Forbes also made panoramic murals and scenic calendars. Included in this collection are photographs and negatives depicting the Paiute Indians in the Owens Valley area and the natural scenery in the Eastern Sierra region. Also included are portraits of other Native American groups and cowboys, as well as photographs of mines, ranches, livestock, towns, and California missions. The photographs in this collection are arranged numerically.

Language of Material: English

Access

Research is by appointment only.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) Collection, 1890-1915. Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Acquisition Information

Andrew Alexander Forbes' archive was acquired from the photographer's son J. McLaren Forbes by the History Department of the Natural History Museum in 1975.

Biography/Administrative History

Andrew Alexander Forbes (1862-1921) was born in Ottawa Township, Wisconsin, and became interested in photography around the late 1870s or early 1880s while working on his family's cattle ranch. Among his photographic achievements are photographs taken at the opening of the "Cherokee Strip" at the fourth Oklahoma land run in September 1893. It is not known how he took on the skill, but it is likely that he was influenced by his mother as well as by William Prettyman, George B. Cornish, and Thomas Croft, all whom he worked alongside during his time photographing western territories as an itinerant photographer. Forbes considered himself first and foremost a landscape photographer. He worked primarily with the bulky large format camera, which was not easy to work with on account of the size of the equipment and materials. However, his use of 8x10 negatives on color-blind plates yielded extremely high-quality prints. Before opening his own studio, he traveled throughout the United States, photographing railroad construction workers, cowboys, cattle roundups, sod houses, and Native Americans in areas such as Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. He settled with the rest of the Forbes family in California in 1890, first near Wildomar in Riverside County and later Santa Ana in Orange County. During this time he also photographed areas in California such as Death Valley and the Eastern Sierra.

Around 1902, he established Forbes Studio on West Line Street in Bishop, Inyo County, California. His studio was immensely popular among the Paiute Indians in the area who frequently had their portraits taken by Forbes and became his friends. These relationships in turn also provided him with the unique opportunity to photograph their neighboring encampments in Owens Valley and Yosemite. A recurring subject was Paiute women in maternal scenes. In 1905, he was assigned to photograph water resources in Owens Valley for Fred Eaton, the former mayor of Los Angeles who was embroiled in the California Water Wars of the early 20th century. Forbes, however, opposed the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. In 1916, Forbes closed his studio and relocated to Southern California with his wife Mary Rozette Prutzman and their son J. McLaren Forbes in hopes of opening a new studio. Unfortunately, a new location never came to fruition. Aside from photography, Forbes was actively involved in his community, participating in church groups and local plays. He was also a member of the Odd Fellows Lodge. Forbes died in 1921 of a heart attack in Lompoc, California.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection consists of negatives, prints and postcards. Andrew Alexander Forbes was the first resident photographer in the Owens Valley area of California. He maintained a commercial photo studio in Bishop from 1902 to 1916. In addition, Forbes also made panoramic murals and scenic calendars. Included in this collection are photographs and negatives depicting the Paiute

Indians in the Owens Valley area and the natural scenery in the Eastern Sierra region. Also included are portraits of other Native American groups and cowboys, as well as photographs of mines, ranches, livestock, towns, and California missions in Inyo County and eastern California. The photographs in this collection are arranged numerically, but the finding aid is organized by geographic region.

Indexing Terms

Big Pine (Calif.) -- History
Bishop (Calif.) -- History
Bodie (Calif.) -- History
Bowie (Ariz.) -- History
Cactus -- Arizona
Camp sites, facilities, etc. -- California
Canyons -- California
Cheyenne Indians -- Portraits
Cowboys
Death Valley National Park (Calif. and Nev.) -- History
Glaciers -- California
Grand Canyon National Park (Ariz.)
Hopi Indian Reservation (Ariz.)
Hydroelectric power plants -- California -- Owens Valley
Ice caves -- California
Indians of North America -- Dwellings
Indians of North America -- Portraits
Kings Canyon National Park (Calif.)
Los Angeles Aqueduct (Calif.)
Mammoth Lakes (Calif.)
Mono Lake (Calif.)
Mountains -- California
Navajo Indians -- Portraits
Oklahoma -- History
Owens Valley (Calif.)
Paiute Indians -- Dwellings
Paiute Indians -- Portraits
Petrified Forest National Park (Ariz.)
Rivers -- California -- Owens Valley
Salton Sea (Calif.) -- History
Sequoia National Park (Calif.) -- History
Sierra Nevada (Calif. and Nev.)
Spanish mission buildings -- California
Stratford (Tex.) -- History
Texas Canyon (Ariz.)
Tres Pinos (Calif.)
Whitney, Mount (Calif.)
Yosemite National Park (Calif.)

Series 1 California

Scope and Content:

Subseries 1 Inyo County

Scope and Content:

This series contains photographs of buildings, street scenes, power plants, natural landscapes such as mountains, rivers, lakes, and ice caves, as well as portraits of Paiute Indians, men, women, and animals in areas including:

Andrews Camp
Big Pine Creek
Bishop
Death Valley
Independence
Keeler
Lake Sabrina
Lone Pine
Mount Tom
Mount Whitney
Mount Williamson
Owens River
Owens Valley
Rock Creek Lake
Summit Lake
Sunland
Sunset Lake
Westgard Pass
White Mountains

Subseries 2 Mono County

Scope and Content:

This subseries contains photographs of natural landscapes such as lakes and mountains, portraits of Paiute Indians, animals, stagecoaches, mines, street scenes, and buildings in areas that include:

Agnew Lake

Barney Lake
Benton
Bodie
Bridgeport
Casa Diablo Mine
Convict Lake
Crystal Lake
Ellery Lake
George Lake
Grant Lake
Green Creek
Gull Lake
June Lake
Koip Crest
Lake Mary
Lee Vining Canyon
Lundy
Mammoth Lakes
Mammoth Mountain
Mono Craters
Piute Pass
Rush Creek
Sherwin Hill
Tioga Lake
Twin Lakes

Subseries 3 Mariposa County

Scope and Content:

Subseries 4 Other California counties

Scope and Content:

Series 2 Arizona

Subseries 1 Coconino County

Scope and Content:

Subseries 2 Navajo County

Scope and Content:

Subseries 3 Cochise County

Scope and Content:

Subseries 4 Other Arizona counties

Scope and Content:

Series 3 Oklahoma

Scope and Content:

Series 4 Kansas and Colorado

Scope and Content:

Series 5 Nevada

Scope and Content:

Series 6 New Mexico

Scope and Content:

