



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

William R. Pywell photographs from the Yellowstone Expedition, 1873

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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | National Anthropological Archives |
| Title: | William R. Pywell photographs from the Yellowstone Expedition |
| Identifier: | NAA.PhotoLot.166 |
| Date: | 1873 |
| Creator: | Pywell, Wm. R. (William Redish), 1843-1886 (Photographer) |
| Extent: | 13 Photographic prints (silver gelatin contact prints) 10 Glass negatives (collodion stereo negatives) |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | Photographs made by William R. Pywell documenting the Yellowstone Expedition of 1873. They comprise images of the expedition's camps, transportation, and members including George Armstrong Custer and Bloody Knife. The collection contains images of human remains. |

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Smithsonian Institution organized the expedition's scientific corps, however, the Army Corps of Engineers funded the scientists, who were equipped by the Quartermaster Corps. This led to confusion over the ownership of Pywell's negatives. From 1873 to 1877 they were passed around, with Pywell borrowing them to print from. Eventually the negatives returned to the War Department, who then gave them to the Smithsonian; they became part of the collections of the Bureau of American Ethnology. Around 1948, some of the negatives went to the National Archives. It is not clear why this occurred or if the division of the negatives between the two repositories was intentional.

Location of Other Archival Materials

The National Archives holds Pywell negatives transferred by the BAE circa 1948 (Record Group 106) and the E. Marshall Pywell Photographic Collection, circa 1874 - circa 1975. Additional records of the Yellowstone Expedition can be found in Record Group 391 and 393.

Processing Information

This collection has been relocated from Photo Lot 78 and MS 4498. Contact prints of these and some additional Pywell negatives, previously filed in MS 4498, have been relocated and merged with Photo Lot 166.

The negatives and prints had been renumbered several times; for more consistent control new numbers were assigned with the format: collection number.item number (i.e. 166.2).

Preferred Citation

Photo Lot 166, William R. Pywell photographs from the Yellowstone Expedition, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

- The collection is open for research.
- Access to the collection requires an appointment.
- The collection contains images of human remains.

Conditions Governing Use

- Contact the repository for terms of use.

Biographical Note

William Redish Pywell (1843-1886) received photographic training from Alexander Gardner and worked as a photographer in a Washington, D.C., studio owned by Matthew Brady during and after the Civil War. After opening his own studio in Washington, Pywell became official photographer for the Yellowstone Expedition in 1873.

Historical Note

Comprised primarily of US Army cavalry and infantry, the Yellowstone Expedition of 1873 was organized to escort and protect the Northern Pacific Railroad Survey. Colonel David S. Stanley led the expedition, with Lieutenant Commander George Armstrong Custer second in command. The War Department also charged Stanley with exploring the region and reporting back on the natural features and resources. As such, a small scientific corps consisting of a paleontologist, geologist, mineralogist, zoologist, botanist, photographer (Pywell), and artist accompanied the expedition. The party set out to Yellowstone from Fort Rice in Dakota Territory in June of 1873, returning in September.

Scope and Contents

Stereoscopic photographs made by William R. Pywell documenting the Yellowstone Expedition of 1873. They comprise images of the expedition's camps, transportation, and members including George Armstrong Custer and Bloody Knife.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Arikara Indians
- Covered wagons
- Hunkpapa Lakota (Hunkpapa Sioux)

Cultures:

- Hunkpapa Lakota (Hunkpapa Sioux)

Types of Materials:

- Photographs

Names:

Bloody Knife, approximately 1840-1876
Custer, George Armstrong, 1839-1876

Addl. KW Subj

Sioux

Container Listing

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.1: Men, horses, and wagons descending hill 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.2: Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer sitting next to freshly-killed elk 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print Image(s): Lieutenant Commander George Armstrong Custer sitting next to freshly-killed elk |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.3: Wagon train in rocky meadow 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.4: Expedition party on prairie 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.5: Bend in small river with two men wading 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.6: Small structure made of saplings, possibly frame for sweat lodge 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.7: Man standing next to temporary Native lodge made of fallen timber 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.8: Travois burial (possibly Cheyenne) 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.9: Bloody Knife, Hunkpapa and Arikara scout, with horse 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Box 1; Envelope 1 | 166.10: Army officer with horse 1 Glass negative 1 Photographic print |
| Envelope 1 | 166.11: Men sitting outside cluster of tents 1 Photographic print |
| Envelope 1 | 166.12: Line of tents with wagons and horses in background |

1 Photographic print

Envelope 1

166.13: Expedition party camp on prairie
1 Photographic print

General Custer and slain elk

1 Photograph (8x10 in)

Creator: Pywell, Wm. R. (William Redish), 1843-1886

Notes: NAA INV.10083700

Extract from a letter written by General Custer to his wife: "Stockade" on the Yellowstone, September 6, 1873. I think I told you in my letter of eighty pages about my chasing elk four miles and killing three. Since then I have had the good fortune to kill a fine large buck elk taller than "Dandy" weighing cleaned eight hundred pounds, and with the handsomest pair of antlers I ever saw, and such a beautiful coat. I killed him only a mile and a half from camp, sent for a wagon, and carried him entire back with us, when the officers and men, and even those belonging to the scientific party, flocked to the grassy plot in front of my tent to see him. The photographer who accompanied the scientists hitched up his photograph-wagon and drove over to take a picture of what they called the "King of the Forest." All the officers and the photographer insisted that not only the game but the hunter should appear in the picture. So I sat down, dressed as I was in my buckskins, resting one hand on an antler, and you may judge of the immense size of the elk when I tell you that as I sat there my head only reached to about half the height of the antlers. The picture is to form one of the series now being collected on the expedition under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institute.

Photograph answering the description given by General Custer in letter to his wife, September 6, 1873. He states that the picture was to "form one of the series now being collected on the expedition under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institute."

Previously filed in Photo Lot 78. Relocated to Photo Lot 166 in 2014.

Black and white glass negative

Reproduced in The Custer Album by Lawrence A. Frost, 1964 Superior Publishing Co., Seattle, Washington, and attributed to William H. Illingworth evidently on the assumption that the photo was taken in 1874 when Illingworth was photographing. page 138.

Genre/Form: Photographs