George H. Cannon Collection

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Finding aid written in English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections

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Houghton, , 49931

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Summary Information

Repository: Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections
Title: George H. Cannon Collection
Identifier: MS-948
Date: 1846-2012
Physical Description: 0.01 Cubic Feet (in 1 folder)
Container: Sc_box 5, Folder: 50 (Mixed Materials)

Preferred Citation

MS-948, George H. Cannon Collection, Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

Collection Scope and Content Summary

Collection, 1846-2012, of materials documenting George H. Cannon, a member of an early surveying and copper prospecting company in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The collection documents Cannon’s life through his own words and through documentation assembled or produced by his descendants. Cannon kept a diary of his 1846 surveying journey around Lake Superior, detailing his encounters with native and European residents of the settlements his party visited and commenting on such matters as the geology and terrain of the Upper Peninsula. In his later years, Cannon wrote out the contents of his diary in the style of popular contemporary narratives, but the manuscript remained unpublished until 1982, when a senior student at Kalamazoo College transcribed it as A Narrative of One Year in the Wilderness. This bound volume—also includes illustrations, explicative footnotes, and an elaboration on the history of Cannon and the project—constitutes the largest part of the collection. Also included is a 1906 clipping from the Detroit Free Press state edition on Cannon’s efforts to demonstrate that the 1840-1841 survey of the Michigan-Wisconsin boundary deprived Michigan of nearly six hundred square miles of territory. The final item in the collection is a letter from Cannon’s great-grandson, explaining the provenance of the materials and providing a modicum of additional information on Cannon’s life.

Access

Available for use in the Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections.

Biography
George Henry Cannon was born to Pearl and Mary (Fuller) Cannon in Day, New York on December 30, 1826. He was one of eleven children. In 1833, the large family joined the vast wave of westward American migration, taking up residence in the town of Saline in Washtenaw County, Michigan. Four years later, the Cannons relocated to the small settlement of Bruce in Macomb County. Young George received a hard-won education in the rural schools, working for his teachers in exchange for tuition and for local families to compensate for his board.

In the early spring of 1846, nineteen-year-old Cannon signed on with the American Exploring Company to participate in a survey of the Lake Superior mineral region. Reports of abundant copper resources had sparked a frenetic rush to establish mines in the region just three years earlier, but the lackluster returns of most early endeavors had left would-be investors skeptical of the Upper Peninsula’s mineralogical potential. The American Exploring Company—armed with abundant capital from the East Coast and outfitted with a charter from the state legislature of Vermont—proposed to resolve the uncertainty with a more extensive exploration of the region. More than sixty men set out under the company’s auspices, dividing into seven teams of engineers, woodsmen, and adventurous but inexperienced youth like Cannon. As a member of the expedition, Cannon extensively traveled the shores of Lake Superior, visiting Wisconsin’s Apostle Islands and various areas of the Upper Peninsula, including the Keweenaw Peninsula, the Porcupine Mountains, Pictured Rocks, and Sault Ste. Marie.

Upon his return to the Lower Peninsula in 1847, Cannon furthered his education at an advanced academy in Rochester, Michigan. He subsequently taught school in Oakland and Macomb counties before being hired by Judge W.A. Burt to conduct additional surveys in 1849. Following his successful work in the Saginaw region, Cannon was named a United States Deputy Surveyor in August 1850; his career through the mid-1850s took him to the Grand Traverse Bay, Cheboygan, and across the Upper Peninsula, where he completed the mineralogical survey interrupted by the death of Douglass Houghton. After the government discontinued public surveys in 1857, Cannon returned to Macomb County and engaged in selection and analysis of pine and farming lands in Michigan and Wisconsin.

In 1852, Cannon married Lucy Marie Cole, also a native of New York. The couple had six children, three of whom died in childhood. Cannon died in Shelby Township near Detroit on December 11, 1909 at the age of eighty-two.

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**Language of Material**

English

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**Abstract**

Collection, 1846-2012, of materials documenting George H. Cannon, a member of an early surveying and copper prospecting company in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, including a transcribed and contextualized copy of Cannon’s 1846 diary, a 1902 newspaper report on his work to correct state boundary survey errors, and a 2012 letter from Cannon’s great-grandson.

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**Conditions Governing Use**
Various copying restrictions apply. Guidelines are available from Michigan Technological University Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections.

Processing History

Emily Riippa, 11/16/2016

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Controlled Access Headings

- Clippings (Information artifacts)
- Copper Harbor (Mich.)
- Diaries
- Indians
- Indians of North America -- Michigan -- Upper Peninsula
- Keweenaw Peninsula (Mich.)
- L'Anse (Mich.)
- Letters (Correspondence)
- Madeline Island (Wis.)
- Memoirs
- Ontonagon (Mich.)
- Sault Sainte Marie (Mich.)
- Superior, Lake
- Surveying -- History
- Wisconsin -- Description and travel

Collection Inventory

"A Narrative of One Year in the Wilderness", 1846 - 1982

Date: 1846 - 1982

Date: Majority of material found within 1846 - 1847
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<thead>
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<th>Detroit Free Press newspaper clipping, 1906</th>
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