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LETTERS RECEIVED BY JOHN WESLEY POWELL,  
DIRECTOR OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION, 1869-79



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Prior to the creation of the United States Geological Survey in 1879 there were operating in the western territories four separate surveys, known officially as follows:

1. The Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, commonly referred to as the Hayden Survey;
2. The Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel, commonly referred to as the King Survey;
3. The Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region, commonly referred to as the Powell Survey; and
4. The Geographical Survey West of the One Hundredth Meridian, commonly referred to as the Wheeler Survey.

The operations of these four surveys represent an important chapter in the exploration and development of the mountain West and in the development of the American geographical and geological sciences.

The records reproduced on the 10 rolls of this microcopy are part of the records of the Powell Survey and consist of the letters received, 1869-79, by Maj. John Wesley Powell as Director. These letters were contained in 10 reddish-brown, leather volumes, all measuring 8 1/2" x 11", and bearing on their backstrips the title "Letters Received, Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region." The volumes reproduced on this microcopy were not numbered, nor were the letters within numbered. The letters were systematically arranged, however, first by years, and under each year alphabetically by surname of correspondent or, occasionally, by the name of the institution represented by the correspondent. On the backstrip of each volume were stamped the year and the portion of the alphabet represented by its contents.

It should be pointed out that despite the fact that the above title appears on all these volumes, the Powell Survey was known officially as the "Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region" only from 1876 to 1879. From 1874 to 1876 its official title was the "Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, Second Division" (the "First Division" being the Hayden Survey). Before that,

the Survey had no official title unless it was "The Survey of the Colorado of the West and Its Tributaries," which was the language used consistently by Congress in making its annual appropriations to this project.

Powell's daring descent of the Colorado River and its canyons in 1869 was made almost as a private venture in exploration. His only assistance from the Government was the authorization by a joint resolution of Congress for the Secretary of War "to issue rations for twenty-five men of the expedition engaged in the exploration of the River Colorado" (15 Stat. 253). The first direct appropriation "for completing the survey of the Colorado of the West and its tributaries" was contained in an act approved July 12, 1870 (16 Stat. 242); this was for \$12,000, to be expended under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior. An act approved March 3, 1871 (16 Stat. 503), appropriated another \$12,000 for "continuing the completion" of the Survey, this time, however, "under the direction of the Smithsonian Institution." In 1872 the sum of \$20,000 was allowed (17 Stat. 350), but in 1873 there was granted only "the sum of ten thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary . . . to enable Professor J. W. Powell to prepare his materials, and to present to Congress at its next session a report of the survey of the Colorado of the West and its tributaries" (17 Stat. 513). This represented the end of the phase of the Survey as carried on under the Smithsonian Institution. Powell's long awaited official report, *Exploration of the Colorado River of the West and Its Tributaries*, was published under the auspices of that agency in 1875.

Meanwhile, the Survey was given a new lease of life by the appropriation, June 23, 1874 (18 Stat. 207), of \$15,000 for the continuation of the work under Powell "in Utah." It was to be done, however, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, who attached Powell's survey administratively to the Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, as its "Second Division." This in no way placed Powell under Hayden. The two surveys operated independently except for the general direction and coordination given by the Secretary of the Interior. Appropriation acts of March 3, 1875 (18 Stat. 375), July 31, 1876 (19 Stat. 120), March 3, 1877 (19 Stat. 350), June 20, 1878 (20 Stat. 230), and March 3, 1879 (20 Stat. 395), made, respectively \$25,000, \$30,000, \$50,000, \$50,000, and \$20,000 available for Powell's Survey, the last \$20,000 being for completion of reports only. The appropriation act of July 31, 1876, was the first to refer to the Powell Survey as the "geographical and geological survey of the Rocky Mountain Region," by which designation it was subsequently known.

The arrangement of these letters, it must be said, was not carried out without errors. Only one instance has been noted of a letter misplaced as to year, but there may be others. Letters are also rarely

out of place as between letters of the alphabet within any one year, but within the individual letter of the alphabet there are frequent errors in arrangement. Enclosures, apparently, were not handled consistently and often appear before their covering letter. In general, however, the work was well enough done so that the material is usable, and it has not been deemed practical to try to make any corrections in arrangement before filming.

Had these letters been well mounted they would have been satisfactorily preserved. They were, however, pasted to mounting sheets of an inferior paper stock that has deteriorated. Furthermore, they were so attached that writing on the back could not always be consulted, and some of the letters have been torn in efforts to ascertain their full contents. Finally, the making of photographic copies--more and more called for--has often been impossible. It was therefore decided, somewhat reluctantly, to remove these letters from their old mounting sheets, to laminate them with adequate binding strips attached, and to place them in new binders, but before rebinding to make this microcopy. The letters will be rebound in exactly the same order they have had hitherto, and with the same volume integrity (which is also the same order that they will have on this microcopy) so that citations made to them in their old form will continue to be valid. Pages that carry only endorsements will be filmed, but blank pages will not be.

This series of incoming letters and other records of the Powell Survey about to be described were inherited by the United States Geological Survey presumably either at the time of its origin in 1879 or a few years later after Powell had become its Director. They remained in the custody of the Survey until transferred to the National Archives in 1937 with early United States Geological Survey records. In the National Archives they are maintained as a part of a body of records designated as Record Group 57, Records of the Geological Survey.

The records of the Powell Survey in this record group also include four letter books containing press copies of outgoing letters signed by Powell or his chief clerk for the period October 3, 1876, to June 30, 1879. These are numbered and labeled as follows:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Volume 1 | Letters Sent, 1876-77, October 3-December 28 |
| Volume 2 | Letters Sent, 1878, January 2-December 31    |
| Volume 3 | Letters Sent, 1879, January 3-May 5          |
| Volume 4 | Letters Sent, 1879, May 5-June 30            |

All four volumes carry in addition the lettering "Rocky Mountain Survey." No volumes containing copies of letters previous to October 3, 1876, have been located. Probably none existed inasmuch as that

beginning with October 3, 1876, is labeled "Volume 1." Drafts and fair copies of outgoing letters of earlier date are occasionally met with among the incoming letters here filmed. These relate always to official matters of some importance such as replies to the Secretary of the Interior or to a Congressman or congressional committee. Many of the press copies in the above-mentioned volumes are so faint that the series is not deemed suitable for microcopying. It should be consulted, however, in any serious study of the Powell Survey or phases of its work, and copies of letters from it can be furnished on an individual order basis.

A few field notebooks of geologists operating with the Powell Survey also exist among the records of the United States Geological Survey. They are not separate, however, but have been integrated with a series of many thousands of such notebooks, part of which is now in the National Archives. Those of Grove Karl Gilbert are of especial interest. A few maps prepared by the Powell Survey are also in Record Group 57, Records of the Geological Survey. Finally, there is in the National Archives a number of glass-plate negatives of photographs of western landscapes, Indians, Indian dwellings, and prehistoric ruins made by John K. Hillers, photographer with the Powell Survey. These were received from the Smithsonian Institution, which has retained other such negatives and prints. Others are still in the Geological Survey.

Powell's letter books as Director of the United States Geological Survey from 1880 to 1894--29 in number--are in the National Archives and have been filmed as part of Microcopy 152 (Rolls 2-26). The records of the Geological Survey also contain the incoming correspondence addressed to him in this period, bound in 54 volumes to 1889 and unbound thereafter. His letter books as the first Director of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1879-1902, and the incoming letters of the Bureau for the same period are in the custody of the Bureau of American Ethnology in the Smithsonian Institution.

A full outline of the history of the Powell Survey cannot be provided here, but some notes of its scope are necessary to indicate the subject content of the letters on this microcopy. The work of the first few years was largely exploratory in character. Letters referring to the two boat trips down the Colorado are few and disappointing. Powell's journals and notes of this period, which were doubtless considered to be private records, remain in the Bureau of American Ethnology. As appropriations increased, the scope of activities was broadened to include the geography, geology, ethnology, and natural science of the region. Separate parties under leaders with specialized interests were sent into the field. Triangulation surveys of the entire

region were run. Pioneer topographic mapping of the intricate surface was begun. Capt. C. E. Dutton commenced his classic studies of the igneous rock areas of southern Utah and Grove Karl Gilbert began his equally famous investigations of the structure of the Henry Mountains and of ancient Lake Bonneville. Botanists and even ornithologists accompanied the expeditions, and natural history, mineralogical, and paleontological specimens were sent back for identification and description by experts in the East.

The archeological remains of the region and the ethnology and social customs of the surviving Indian tribes more and more absorbed Powell's attention, however, and in his later expeditions he devoted more of his personal attention to these fields. In 1873 he accepted a temporary commission from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to investigate Indian administration in southwest Utah and Nevada, and these letters include correspondence on this subject. In 1876 Joseph Henry, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, turned over to Powell all the materials on the Indian languages gathered by the Smithsonian Institution, and the correspondence indicates that Powell ranged widely in his efforts to add to it. The Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region published under his direction four quarto volumes entitled Contributions to North American Ethnology. One finds in this correspondence, in other words, much of the history of the beginnings of the work carried on by Powell subsequently as the first Director of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

Another developing interest of Powell's that is reflected in these records was that of the administration of the public lands in the arid regions. His parties began collecting data on the amount of land that could be reclaimed by irrigation, and also on grass lands and timber lands, as a result of which Powell became impressed with the inadequacies of existing land laws as adapted to these areas. His report entitled The Lands of the Arid Region resulted in the appointment by Congress of a "Public Lands Commission," of which Powell became a member. Although its recommendations were not adopted, Powell returned to these interests later as Director of the Geological Survey and pioneered in the establishment of land classification and the study of water resources as proper fields of activity for the Survey.

There is much in the correspondence of 1876 about the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, to which his Survey made substantial contributions of material. There is also some material in the following 3 years on the Black Hills Survey of Professor Walter P. Jenney, which was placed administratively under the Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region. In these last years there is also much of interest on the overlapping activities of the four surveys and efforts to work out acceptable delimitations of fields. Finally, one will find here important documents

relating to Powell's part in bringing about the establishment in 1879 of the United States Geological Survey.

The greater part of this correspondence consists of letters from scientists of the period in many fields--Alexander Agassiz, Spencer F. Baird, Elliot Coues, James D. Dana, Clarence Edward Dutton, Henry Gannett, Albert Samuel Gatschet, George Gibbs, Grove Karl Gilbert, Arnold Guyot, Joseph Henry, Clarence King, J. P. Lesley, Joseph Leidy, Othniel C. Marsh, F. B. Meek, T. H. Morgan, J. J. Stevenson, A. H. Thompson, George Vasey, L. F. Ward, George M. Wheeler, Olin D. Wheeler, and J. D. Whitney, to name only some of those that are well known. The letters make a valuable contribution to the history of certain fields of science in this period.

Letters from Members of Congress, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and the Secretary of the Interior concern the objectives and administration of the Survey. Public interest in the expeditions and their results is indicated in the requests for reports, maps, photographs, and information. The requests for articles from editors of scientific and popular magazines are of special interest. There are many letters, for example, from Richard Watson Gilder, editor of Scribners Magazine. There are letters from frontiersmen and Indian agents, including Jacob Hamblen, the "Mormon Leatherstocking." The relationship that Powell established and maintained with his own employees is revealed in letters from those that served under him, from scientists to those that provided the pack animals for his expeditions. These include John K. Hillers, his photographer, who later became the photographer for the United States Geological Survey, and Thomas Moran, the painter. These letters are more numerous in the later years as Powell was forced to spend an increasing portion of his time in Washington supervising the preparation and publication of reports and carrying on his growing correspondence.

The user of this microcopy will doubtless be familiar with the various memoirs prepared by Powell's associates, which appraise the man and his scientific work. The published reports of the Powell Survey are listed in Laurence F. Schmeckebier, Catalogue and Index of the Publications of the Hayden, King, Powell, and Wheeler Surveys (United States Geological Survey Bulletin No. 222).

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Total		\$31