HARRY PIDGEON (1869-1954)

COLLECTION, [1907-1989 and undated]
(bulk 1907-1915)
4 linear feet
and 645 glass negatives

ACQUISITION: The collection was donated by the Yosemite Museum, Yosemite National Park in 1966.

ACCESS: The collection is open for research.

AUDIOVISUAL: Audiocassette in box 2.

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Biography

Harry Pidgeon was born in Henry County, Iowa. He lived and worked on a farm in Iowa until 1887, when, at the age of eighteen, he moved to Bakersfield, California, to work on a ranch. He then relocated to Alaska, where he lived until 1900. He returned to California to work on a ranch near Piru and Sespe. He then settled in the Sugar Pine-Madera-Wawona area where he worked for the Madera Sugar Pine Company and began his career as a photographer.

As a photographer, Pidgeon took shots illustrating everyday life in the early logging community at Sugar Pine. It is uncertain how long he lived and worked among the giant sequoia (known as the Big Trees), but most of his existing photographs are from 1913 to 1925. He became renowned for the high quality of his photographs in spite of the photographic equipment that was available.

After leaving the Big Trees area, he began a career as a sailor. In 1917 he began building his boat, the Islander, a 34-foot chine ketch. Then, in 1925, at the age of 56, Pidgeon became the second man to circumnavigate the earth alone. It took him four years to complete the journey and upon his return, he gave lectures and wrote a book entitled Around the World Single-Handed. In 1937 he completed another successful trip around the world alone. In 1944 he married Margaret Gardener, the daughter of a New London boat builder. When attempting a third trip in 1947, this time with his wife, he was broadsided by a hurricane. His boat was destroyed and they both narrowly escaped death. In 1954, Harry Pidgeon died at the age of 85 in San Pedro, California.
Scope and Content Note

The Harry Pidgeon collection measures 4 linear feet and dates from 1907-1989 and undated. It mostly consists of photographs, both original prints and reprints, of everyday life in the early logging community at Sugar Pine in the Sierra Big Trees area. These photographs were created from the original glass plate negatives that are also held in the Special Collections library (filing cabinet number 6). The glass plate negatives and the original prints were donated together. Reprints were made from the glass plate negatives, many of which duplicate the original prints. However, quite a few of the original prints were missing from the initial donation, a problem rectified by having reprints made from the glass plate negatives.


The Publications series (1928, 1950, 1959-1965 and undated) contains a copy of Pidgeon’s book, Around the World Single-Handed as well as an article he wrote which was published in National Geographic. Also included in this series are clippings from the Sierra Star which feature Pidgeon’s photographs and stories about the subjects portrayed in them.

The Photographs series (1907-1915, 1932) includes photographs depicting Harry Pidgeon and his equipment, people, houses, transportation vehicles, logging, Raymond Quarry, farming, Happy Camp, Fish Camp, scenery, and sequoia trees. The original prints are located in box 2. Box 2 also contains an audiocassette with “Allen Harder’s comments on the Harry Pidgeon photographs” that was created February 8, 1989. The reprints are found in binders 1 through 13 and are listed under volume headings in numerical order and are located in boxes 2 through 4. There is also an index to the collection by photograph number and volume number.

Related Collection

The California Museum of Photography at the University of California, Riverside, has over 1,500 of Harry Pidgeon’s glass plate negatives, some of which can be viewed on their web site (http://photo.ucr.edu/california/projects/railroad/pidgeon/pidgeon.html).
**Box no.**  **Description**

**Box 1**

**Biographical information**
- General, 1954, 1973-1974 and undated

**Publications**
- “Around the World in the Islander,” in *National Geographic*, 1928
- *Sierra Star* articles, 1959-1965 and undated

**Box 2**

**Photographs**
- Original prints
  - Case 1
    - Photographs 1-184
  - Case 2
    - Photographs 185-340
  - Case 3
    - Photographs 359-742
    - Audiocassette, 1989
- Photograph index

**Box 3**

**Reprints**
- Volume 1
  - Harry Pidgeon and his equipment
    - Adults
  - Volume 2
    - Adults
    - Children
  - Volume 3
    - Children
    - Family Groups
  - Volume 4
    - Family Groups
    - School Groups
    - Masons
  - Volume 5
    - General Groups
    - Camping Scenes
Box.   Description

Box 3 (cont.)

Photographs (cont.)
Reprints (cont.)
  Hunting
  Rifle Camp
  Army at Wawona
Volume 6
  Houses - Exterior
  Houses - Interior
Volume 7
  Automobiles
  Railroads
  Wagons
  Loggers

Box 4

Volume 8
  Logging Camp
  Logging Activities
  Sugar Pine Mill and Store
Volume 9
  Donkey Engine
  Raymond Quarry
  Farm Animals
  Farm Machinery
Volume 10
  Happy Camp
  Forest
Volume 11
  Forest Fires
  Monterey
Volume 12
  Trees - Miscellaneous
  Faithful Couple
  Virginia Tree
  California Tree
  Fallen Monarch
  Grizzly Giant
Volume 13
  Grizzly Giant
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