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Guide to the Kaweah Cooperative Colony Papers

WA MSS S-1304



by Heather L. Holeman

October 1986

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: WA MSS S-1304

CREATOR: Kaweah Colony

TITLE: Kaweah Cooperative Colony papers

DATES: 1886-1890

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.25 linear feet (1 box)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers contain correspondence, business and legal papers, meeting records, and photographs documenting the existence of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.kaweah>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.kaweah>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Kaweah Cooperative Colony Papers were purchased from Argus Books in 1978 with proceeds from the Frederick W. and Carrie S. Beinecke Fund for Western Americana.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Kaweah Cooperative Colony Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

The Kaweah Cooperative Colony Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Scope and Contents

The Kaweah Cooperative Colony Papers document the internal politics and business practices of a nineteenth-century utopian community. The papers are alphabetically and then chronologically arranged by material type. They span the dates 1886-1890.

Inspired by Edmund Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward* and the Nationalist movement, the Kaweah Cooperative Colony was organized in 1886. Located on the Kaweah River, Tulare County, California, it began as a tent settlement operated on the principle of equal work and equal compensation for men and women. The colony's board of directors developed a table of organization and carefully divided the work responsibilities. The settlement's growth, however, was hampered by internal disagreements over the directors' authority, the colony's priorities, and rules for membership. While formulating a plan of organization, the colony lost a local timber contract; and due to inefficient financial management, a primary project, building a road, was cancelled.

Correspondence reveals the tensions and differing opinions among the directors of the colony, addresses the loss of timber contracts, and covers disagreements over the directors' authority. The major figures represented in the correspondence are the president, William J. Cuthbertson; general secretary, J. J. Martin; and members of the board of directors P. N. Kuss, J. C. Wright, P. B. Hirsch, J. G. Wright, and Robert Linbridge.

Expenditures, receipts, and legal papers combine to give a financial overview of the colony. Its timecheck economy was similar to a token economy, in which the members received chits for work time, redeemable for goods within the colony. The financial accounts provide insights into the colony's internal workings and financial relationship with the outside world.

Issue number 20 of *The Commonwealth*, the colony's newsletter, gives a full account of the development and purpose of the colony along with a brief history of the Nationalist movement. The meeting records outline the directors' decisions, but provide only limited information. The tables of organization, on the other hand, provide extensive data about the colonists' views for organizing the colony. The papers include three folders of photographs of the colony, group pictures, and scenes of Tulare County taken by C. C. Curtis of nearby Esperanza.

Collection Contents

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| b. 1, f. 1-2 | Correspondence | 1887-88 |
| b. 1, f. 3 | Expenditures and receipts | 1886-87, n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 4 | Expenditures and receipts:scrapbook | 1886-88 |
| b. 1, f. 5 | Journal: <i>The Commonwealth</i> | 1889 |
| b. 1, f. 6 | Legal papers | 1888, n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 7 | Meeting records | 1886-88 |
| b. 1, f. 8-10 | Photographs | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 11 | Table of organization | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 12 | Miscellaneous papers | 1890 |

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Collective settlements -- California
Cooperative societies -- California
Socialism -- California
Utopias -- History -- 19th century

Geographic Names

California -- Social life and customs -- 19th century
Tulare County (Calif.)

Genres / Formats

Photoprints -- United States

Occupations

Socialists -- California

Corporate Body

Kaweah Colony