
ARIZONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MS 268
FOURR, WILLIAM (“UNCLE BILLY”), 1843-1935
PAPERS, 1864-1983

DESCRIPTION

Fourr was one of Arizona's pioneer settlers who came to the territory in 1863 to prospect for gold and died at his ranch in the Dragoon Mountains in 1935. Fourr, known as “Uncle Billy” was a gold prospector, rider on the Southern Arizona mail route, rancher, Apache Indian fighter and cattleman. This collection consists chiefly of a hand-written six-volume memoir of his adventures in Arizona entitled A Young Man's Life in the West. The collection includes type-written transcripts of the originals plus Fourr's reminiscences of his life as told to Mrs. George S. Kitt, Secretary of the Pioneer Society, during the period 1925-30. The collection includes an oath of allegiance to the United States (Union side of Civil War) signed by Fourr, Feb. 21, 1864.

1 boxes, .5 linear ft.

ACQUISITION

These materials were donated to this Historical Society in the early 1930's by Mr. and Mrs. William Fourr.

ACCESS

There are no restrictions on access to this collection.

COPYRIGHT

Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be addressed to the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Archives Department.

PROCESSING

Processing of this collection was completed in January 1998 by Sue Conklin, Volunteer, under the supervision of Riva Dean, Archives Manager.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

William Fourn was born in Missouri on July 11, 1842. He headed west while still in his teens when he hired on as a cattle driver with a herd headed to Fort Craig in New Mexico in 1861. He worked at the Fort for several years until he heard about a gold discovery in Arizona and headed for Prescott to try his luck. He didn't find gold so he hired on as a rider on the southern Arizona mail route between Gila Bend and Yuma. He later managed the Kenyon and Burk stage stations on the toll road along the Gila. While connected with the stage route Fourn met many of Arizona's leading pioneers: Charles T. Hayden, Jack Swilling, Tom Jeffords, the Ourys and many others.

For a while Fourn and his family ranched at Oatman Flat along the Gila where they were often raided by the Apaches. Eventually Uncle Billy joined Col. Woolsey, the famous Indian fighter, in an unsuccessful effort to recover their livestock stolen by the Apaches. Fourn tried life in California, briefly, but returned to Arizona in 1880 where he established his ranch, the Fourn-F, in the Dragoon Mountains. The first few years in this area were exciting with continuing trouble from the Apaches at the nearby Cochise stronghold and all the outlaws in Tombstone which was also not far away. Eventually, life settled down and Fourn became a very successful cattleman. He and his wife Lucinda had twelve children, eight of whom survived to maturity. Many of Fourn's descendants continue to live in Arizona.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection contains the six volumes of Fourn's original manuscript, A Young Man's Life in the West. This is Fourn's life story from the time he left Missouri as a young lad until he finally settled down in Arizona. It covers his adventures as a cattle drover at Fort Craig, fighting the Apaches, crime and criminals, hardships on the mail run and life on the stage route. He describes the early communities of Tucson, Prescott, Phoenix and Tombstone and life as a miner, farmer and cattleman. Individuals mentioned in his memoirs and reminiscences include King Woolsey, Charles T. Hayden, Jack Swilling, Henry Wickenburg, Curly Bill, Mangas Coloradas, Cochise and Tom Jeffords. Also included in the collection is an original pass issued to Fourn by the provost marshal in Las Cruces, New Mexico, in February 1864 for travel to Tucson.

The collection contains typewritten transcripts of the six original volumes that make up A Young Man's Life in the West. Also included are several versions of Reminiscences of Early Days as told by William Fourn to Mrs. George F. Kitt, 1925-1930. This manuscript contains many of the same stories that Fourn relates in his six volume memoirs. This box also contains some letters by Fourn to Mrs. Kitt about his reminiscences and a family genealogy compiled by one of Fourn's granddaughters, Bennie Lucille Bennett Davis in 1983.

INVENTORY

- File 1- Fourn, William. Book One. A Young Man's Life in the West.
Typescript, pgs. 1-11.
- File 2 - Book Two. A Young Boy's Life Away From Home in the West.
Typescript, pgs. 12-37.
- File 3 - Book Three. Outlaws. Typescript. Pgs. 38-91.
- File 4 - Book Four. Fort Craig, New Mexico. Typescript, pgs. 92-148
- File 5 - Book Five. Typescript, pgs. 149-228.
- File 6 - Book Six. How Prescott Has Grown to be a Little City or
Little Town.. Typescript, pgs. 229-237.
- File 7 - Rough draft (handwritten) of books, 2, 3, and 4.
- File 8 - Reminiscences of Early Days as told by William Fourn to
Mrs. George F. Kitt, 1925-1930. [There are several
typewritten versions of this manuscript.]
- File 9 - Letter to the Arizona Historical Society dated November 3, 1983 from
Bennie Lucille Bennett Davis of Tombstone (granddaughter of William
Fourn) giving the names and descendants of the eight children of
William and Lucinda Fourn who survived to maturity.
- File 10 - Four letters to Mrs. George Kitt at the Arizona Historical Society from
Mr. and Mrs. William Fourn, 1920-1932.
- File 11 - Oath of allegiance, Wm. Fourn to United States, 1864