

MS 629 ARTHUR WALTER KEDDIE FAMILY PAPERS

1867-1976. 2 oversize boxes

This collection contains material collected by surveyor Arthur W. Keddie and his family relating to his discovery of an alternative transcontinental railroad route through Feather River Canyon as well as his contribution to the development of Plumas County.

Includes photographs taken by Arthur Keddie during a trip to Mexico and a letter, missing the first two of its eight pages, written by Arthur W. Keddie to his fiancé Margaret in 1867 during his landmark survey of the Feather River Canyon. The letter includes a pencil sketch of possible routes through the Canyon and discusses the merits of each. It contains information about the survey's progress, the other surveyors, and the weather, which was unusually snow-free for winter. A scrapbook kept by Arthur Keddie contains newspaper and magazine clippings from 1904-1925 (and one from 1937), wedding invitations, and poetry. Also includes biographical information about prominent local people, such as marriages and deaths. There are many articles in the scrapbook about Arthur Keddie and the Western Pacific Railroad.

There are several file folders of loose clippings from 1937-1960 which appear to have been gathered by Arthur Keddie's daughter Helen. Subjects in these clippings include the completion of the Feather River highway in 1937, the Ruby Spike Ceremony of the Western Pacific Railroad in 1949, and the WP 50th Anniversary celebration in 1953. Many of the articles contain tributes to Arthur Keddie. There is a biographical information file that includes material about Arthur Keddie's life and the marriage of his daughter, Helen.

Also includes a typescript, 75 pages long, entitled, "They Had a Dream: Feather River Highway 1866 to 1941," compiled by Margaret Mason.

Artifacts have been transferred to the artifact collection. Timetables, postcards, seniority rosters, magazines, annual reports and some photographs have also been transferred to Library subject files.

PROVENANCE Purchased from Isabell Zissimos, 2006.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION Arthur Walter Keddie, who is called the father of the Western Pacific Railroad, was born in Perthshire, Scotland on June 27, 1842, and moved to Ontario, Canada with his family when he was one year old. Keddie showed an early interest in surveying and engineering. He served a three-year apprenticeship under a provincial land surveyor in Whitby, Ontario, and later passed his provincial surveyors examinations.

In the fall of 1863, Mr. Keddie left Canada for the United States. He arrived in California in September of 1863, where he found a job assisting in the compilation of George L. Holt's map of California and Nevada. In 1864, he was sent to Plumas County to survey a wagon road and he decided to settle there. In 1867, he surveyed the Feather River Canyon for the Oroville & Beckwourth Pass Wagon Road Company. Mr. Keddie noted the small grade in the canyon and realized that building a railroad up the Feather River Canyon instead of through the Sierra would be advantageous.

Arthur Keddie's surveys and plans for a railroad through the Feather River Canyon were examined and rejected by Collis P. Huntington, who built the Central Pacific Railroad over the Sierra instead. It wasn't until 1903 that his plans were adopted by the newly incorporated Western Pacific Railway and the Feather River Canyon railroad route was constructed. Mr. Keddie was hired by the railroad to supervise construction and in December, 1904, he was promoted to Assistant Chief Engineer.

After obtaining U.S. citizenship in 1868, Mr. Keddie was elected surveyor for Plumas County. The following year, he was appointed United States Deputy Surveyor. He was very active in the community of Quincy, serving a member of its first Fire Department, a notary public, a member of the Odd Fellows. He was also a Mason, becoming Master of the Lodge on three occasions, from 1877-1882, again in 1885-1886 and in 1889-1890. He produced a map of Plumas County in 1874, which was declared the official map of Plumas County by the county supervisors several times. Arthur Keddie advocated using the North Fork route of the Feather River as a highway. Other Plumas County citizens supported this vision by voting in 1909, 1915 and 1919 for highway construction bonds.

On June 9, 1869, he married to Margaret Douglas Barnes in Whitby, Ontario. The Keddies had a son, William Arthur, and daughters Edith, Margaret, and Helen, a teacher who married Gilbert Palmer in 1905 and died in either 1945 or 1946.

The town of Keddie, seven miles north of Quincy, and a mountain close to Indian Valley, were named after Arthur W. Keddie, who died in Quincy, California on October 17, 1924.

BOX LIST

Folder 1 Article, "They Had A Dream," by Margaret Mason, [circa 1941]
Folder 2 Biographical information, 1952-1976
Folder 3 Letter (incomplete) from Arthur W. Keddie to Margaret D. Barnes, [1867]
Folder 4 Photographs
[Volume] Scrapbook, 1904-1925, 1937

Box 2

Folder 1 Clippings, 1931-1937
Folder 2 Clippings, 1940-1960, 1970

Filing Location: Big Four Building ID 2558

