



FINDING AID

ROBERT COFFEY PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM **ca. 1924-1928**

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HISTORY

Robert Coffey was born August 15, 1895. After graduating from 8th grade, he was hired as an apprentice surveyor for the Union Pacific Railroad. He worked in Denver and southern Colorado before enlisting with the Army and serving during World War I with Company D of the 327 Field Artillery Survey Gunnery in Bordeaux, France.

Following the war, Coffey returned to Colorado and the Union Pacific Railroad. He married Elva Mae Hutchins, who he had first met in 1916, on October 6, 1919. Their daughter, Elaine, was born in October 1920. The family moved to Pueblo, Colorado, where Coffey worked for the Colorado State Highway Department as an Engineer Surveyor. In 1924, he moved to Denver and began service with the Bureau of Public Roads (later the Public Roads Administration).

In 1928, Coffey was sent to Cody, Wyoming, to begin work on the East Entrance road into Yellowstone National Park, now the Buffalo Bill Cody Scenic Byway. Two other road projects were initiated the same year: Norris Junction to Madison Junction and the Grayling Creek section of the West Gallatin Road (now Highway 191). From the photographs in the album, it seems likely that Coffey worked on all three projects.

In later years, Coffey worked on roads throughout the Rocky Mountain region, including serving as Engineer and Chief Surveyor for the Trail Ridge Road (also known as the Beaver Meadow National Scenic Byway) over the Continental Divide near Estes Park, Colorado. During World War II, Coffey helped construct the Alcan Highway (now the Alaska Highway). Post war, he worked in Mesa Verde and Big Bend National Parks as well as the Southern Division of the Public Roads Administration, headquartered out of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Following work on the Pan-American Highway through Mexico, Coffey returned to Yellowstone in 1964, working on the "Circle 8" project. His last project, before retirement in 1965, was resurveying areas of the Alaska Highway.

Following retirement, the Coffeys lived in Denver, Colorado. Robert passed away March 8, 1974.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

ROBERT COFFEY PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM ca. 1924-1928

CATALOG NUMBER YELL 144941

VOLUME 0.2 LF

DESCRIPTION Photograph album and prints taken by Robert Coffey documenting road surveying and construction around Yellowstone National Park, circa 1924-1928.

The collection consists of a photograph album and several loose photographic prints. The album consists of black and white photographs mounted on black construction paper and bound with a soft, brown leather cover inscribed with a poem entitled "Where the West Began" and the words "Yellowstone Park". The loose images are varied in size, including a small panorama, and are finished in either black and white or sepia tones.

The images depict the surveying and construction of several roads to and into Yellowstone National Park. Except for a few unidentified geysers, many of the images appear to have been taken just outside the Park. Although primarily unlabeled, there are images of roads at both the East Entrance, including Sylvan Pass, and the West Gallatin (West Entrance). Construction images include bridge construction, cutting into a hill, laying gravel, and moving boulders with heavy equipment. There are numerous images of the road or surveying crew, including quite a few images of the surveying team with their instruments. There are also images of various tent camps, such as the camp on the West Gallatin, which depict the daily activities of camp life from laundry to fishing. A number of log cabins shown have not been identified, but are most likely located outside the Park, probably in either the Gallatin or Shoshone National Forests. Of the few labeled images, there are views of Gallatin Lake, Robert Coffey, and daughter Elaine Coffey seated on the running board of a U. S. Department of Agriculture truck.

Road construction played a significant role in opening the Park to more visitors in the 1920s and 1930s. This album depicts how this task was accomplished and what life was like for those who worked on the project.

ORGANIZATION

The album remains in its original order.

PROVENANCE

Gift of granddaughter Sharon Gold, 2006.

RESTRICTIONS

NO

*ASSOCIATED
MATERIALS*

- Robert Coffey Alaska Highway Construction Photo Album, 1943 (PCA 525-10), Alaska State Library Historical Collections (Juneau, Alaska).
- Robert Coffey Papers and Photographs, Estes Park Museum (Estes Park, Colorado).

CONTAINER LIST

Box 1

File Unit Nbr	Title
01	Photograph album, ca. 1924-1928
02	Photographic prints, ca. 1924-1928