

Benajah Jay Antrim Journals
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2024

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82078444>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms024019>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Manuscript Division staff, 2024

Collection Summary

Title: Benajah Jay Antrim Journals

Inclusive Dates: 1849

ID No.: MSS78444

Creator: Antrim, Benajah Jay

Extent: 5 items

Extent: 1 container

Extent: 1 linear foot

Extent: 1 microfilm reel

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm82078444>

Summary: Chemist, mathematical instrument maker, artist, photographer, and traveler. Journals kept by artist Benajah Jay Antrim while on a voyage from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Mexico; and an overland journey through Mexico to California.

Online Content: The Benajah Jay Antrim journals are available on the Library of Congress Web site at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000127>. *To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the online edition as available.*

Acquisition Information

The journals of Benajah Jay Antrim were purchased by the Library of Congress in 1906.

Processing History

The journals of Benajah Jay Antrim were conserved and rebound by the Library of Congress. A portion of the journals was microfilmed in 1991 and the entire collection digitized from the originals in 2024. A finding aid was created by Mary A. Lacy with description supplied by Barbara Bair in 2024.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Benajah Jay Antrim is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The journals of Benajah Jay Antrim are open to research. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on one reel. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase and interlibrary loan. *To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition.*

Online Content

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Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Benajah Jay Antrim Journals, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Benajah Jay Antrim (1819-1903) was born in Burlington County, New Jersey, to a Quaker family and attended a Society of Friends school near Philadelphia. He worked as a mathematical instrument maker in Philadelphia and Baltimore. In 1843 he published *Pantography, or Universal Drawings* in which he examined the idea of creating a phonetics-based universal language. On February 1, 1849, he departed Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and traveled by sea for Mexico, and on February 21, 1849, began an overland journey from Tampico via San Luis Potosi and Guadalajara to Mazatlán, arriving at the far coast on April 17, 1849.

After his traveling party reached the Pacific coast, Antrim continued northward to San Francisco, California, arriving there by June 25, 1849. He proceeded inland, taking up residence in Sierra County, California. In 1852-1853 he worked as a photographer in various California gold mining camps and towns, including in the Grass Valley area. He then traveled to Honolulu, Hawaii (then called the Sandwich Islands), to ply his trade, sailing from San Francisco to Honolulu on the *Francis Palmer* in the spring of 1854. Under the name B. Jay Antrim he operated a daguerreotype portrait studio, gallery, and repair business in Honolulu until 1856.

Antrim returned to San Francisco in July 1856 and later lived in various California towns, including Red Bluff (1859), Mariposa (1860), Nevada City (1867), and Cisco (1868-1877), as well as in the state of Nevada, operating a series of small photographic studio galleries in these places.

Scope and Content Note

The journals of Benajah Jay Antrim (1819-1903) are comprised of three volumes of handwritten diary entries and two complementary volumes of pencil or pen-and-ink drawings and watercolor images of his February-April 1849 journey to California through Mexico. These three diaries and two sketchbooks record Antrim's descriptions of historic buildings, churches, flora, fauna, people, and landscape scenes he witnessed in his arrival by sea, and the land crossing to California.

Antrim's highly descriptive daily journal entries and meticulous sketches reveal him to be a receptive observer. Though he viewed Mexico from preconceived Anglo-American perspectives and with the biases of a foreigner having a first-time encounter with the country, its architecture, and its peoples, he possessed a strong desire to see and learn. He expressed appreciation for the dramatic landscapes and natural world he witnessed on days of travel, which typically began near sunrise and covered many miles. He was also impressed by the built environment, architecture, design, and infrastructure he viewed on the journey, including roads and bridges, cathedrals, and residences. He noticed regional geology, including evidence of minerals and a striking black bed of lava stone. He wrote of crops, palm and other fruit trees, local foodways, and the availability of markets or provisions. He included brief notes on a sociological mix of military officers, fellow traveling Americans, those involved in commercial enterprises, landholders, laborers, poverty-stricken individuals, apparent bandits, and politicians. He offered guarded perspectives on crime and justice systems and recorded regional differences in receptiveness to American outsiders. He paid special attention to geography and the highly varied array of natural environments through which they traveled. His sketchbooks are filled with scenes of mountains, deserts, fertile valleys, small villages, private lands and ranchos, sweeping panoramic landscapes, rivers, and ports. He captured the intricacies of government buildings, plazas, fountains, and public art; noted the often sumptuous quality of religious and Spanish Colonial architecture; and documented his first views of the Pacific Ocean.

Arrangement of the Collection

This collection is arranged in five numbered volumes.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Antrim, Benajah Jay--Diaries.
Antrim, Benajah Jay--Illustrations.
Antrim, Benajah Jay.

Organizations

Camargo Company.
Thomas Walters (Brig)

Subjects

Architecture in art.
Cities and towns in art.
Landscapes in art.
Overland journeys to the Pacific.
Religious architecture.
Voyages and travels.

Places

Baja California (Mexico : Peninsula)--Description and travel.
California--Description and travel.
California--In art.
Mazatlán (Sinaloa, Mexico)--Description and travel.
Mexico--Description and travel.
Mexico--In art.
San Luis Potosí (Mexico)--Description and travel.
Tampico (Tamaulipas, Mexico)--Description and travel.

Titles

Benajah Jay Antrim papers

Occupations

Artists.
Chemists.
Linguists.
Mathematical instrument makers.
Photographers.
Travelers.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	Vol. 1, California Journal no. 1 [Journey Through Mexico], 1849 Digital content available
BOX 2	Vol. 2, California Journal no. 2, 1849 Digital content available
BOX 3	Vol. 3, Mexico [Notes, Panorama Around the World . . . Mexico], 1849 Digital content available
BOX 4	Vol. 4, Sketchbook of Mexico and California, 1849 Digital content available
BOX 5	Vol. 5, Sketchbook of Mexico [Panorama Around the World, 2d Night], 1849 Digital content available