

A Guide to the John W. Spitler Surveying Notebook and Travel Diary, 1855 SC 0333

John W. Spitler surveying notebook and travel diary
1855



Title Statement

A Guide to the John W. Spitler Surveying Notebook and Travel Diary, 1855 SC 0333

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

SC 0333

Unit Date

1855

Language

English .

Abstract

The John W. Spitler Surveying Notebook and Travel Diary, 1855, includes various handwritten rules and mathematical formulas used for surveying and plotting land as well as a record of Spitler's trip from Augusta County, Virginia to Kansas City, Missouri with his father, Reverend Jacob Spitler, for a church conference. Both Spitlers died of cholera en route to their destination.

Creator

Spitler, John W. (John William), 1834-1855

source

Eclectibles

Extent

0.08 cubic feet 1 folder

Repository

James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection open to research. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

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Acquisition Information

Acquired from Eclectibles in February 2020.

Preferred Citation

[identification of item], [box #, folder #], John W. Spitler Surveying Notebook and Travel Diary, 1855, SC 0333, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

Biographical/Historical Note

John W. Spitler (1834-1855) was born in Augusta County, Virginia to Reverend Jacob Crist Spitler (1811-1855) and Amanda M. Redman (1816-1869). Given the notations present in his notebook, it seems likely that Spitler was pursuing a career in land surveying or at least learning the trade. While traveling from Augusta County to Kansas City, Missouri for a church conference, Spitler and his father both contracted cholera and died within days of each other. They are buried in Jefferson City, Missouri.

Scope and Content

The John W. Spitler Surveying Notebook and Travel Diary, 1855, includes various handwritten rules and mathematical formulas used for surveying and plotting land as well as a record of Spitler's trip from Augusta County, Virginia to Kansas City, Missouri with his father, Reverend Jacob Spitler. Both Spitlers died of cholera en route to their destination.

The first section of the notebook includes notes, rules, and calculations used for surveying and plotting land. Sections include "The Pennsylvania Method of Calculation," "Field Note Exercises in Plotting," "Rule for Dividing Land," "Division of Land According to David's Problem," and "Height & Distances." Diagrams show how to calculate different angles or plots of land. Of particular interest is a diagram of a tree and a pond with angles drawn to calculate the height of the tree.

The second section of the notebook, titled "A Journey to Kansas Territory" and comprising approximately six pages, includes Spitler's travel diary documenting his and his father's trip from Augusta County to Kansas City for a church conference. The two left Virginia on April 4, 1855. His second entry reads: "crossed the Augusta line, fired a grand salute to the old Augusta. Fare the well Augusta, I may never see thy mountains and hills again. Farewell." Spitler's almost daily entries document geographic landmarks, cities, and distance traveled. Notable locations include the Allegheny Mountains, Greenbrier River, Ohio River, Mississippi River, Cincinnati, and Louisville. Spitler also describes steamboats he saw and traveled on including the *Empire City* bound for Pittsburgh and the *Washington City* bound for St. Louis. Spitler and his father last traveled on the *New Lucy* which departed St. Louis on April 21, 1855 bound for Kansas City, Missouri. Soon after Spitler writes "Monday 23rd on the Missouri River, man died with the colera [sic] Monday night. Tues. 24th, stuck on a sand bar near by all day." The travel diary concludes with this entry. John W. Spitler and his father Reverend Jacob Spitler died of cholera just days later, on April 26 and April 30 respectively.

The notebook exhibits typical wear, with the cloth separating from the board covers. The cover closure is detached.

Keywords

Notebooks

Diaries

Travelers' writings -- 19th century

Travel -- History -- 19th century

Voyages and travels -- History -- 19th century

Surveying

United States -- Description and travel

Virginia -- Description and travel

Eclectibles

Arrangement

The notebook is bound and housed in a folder.

Description of Subordinate Components

John W. Spitler surveying notebook and travel diary

Unit Date 1855

Mixed Materials [1000885703] 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)