

HISTORY 374
HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WEST
Professor Martha Sandweiss

Assignment 1. Five pages, plus a transcript and bibliography.

This assignment requires you to think and write like an historian, as you try to make sense of an original nineteenth-century western manuscript from the collections of Firestone Library. The final product will consist of two parts: 1. A typed transcript of the equivalent of roughly three manuscript pages and 2. A five-page paper (plus an attached bibliography) that places this document in its historical context, and demonstrates how a primary source text can speak to larger issues.

To make the task easier, we've broken it down into its component parts.

1. SELECT YOUR DOCUMENT.

Go to <http://transcribe.princeton.edu/courseinfo> and review the descriptive checklist of available manuscripts. Make a preliminary selection of what you would like to examine. You may want to wait until after you've seen the original documents before making your final selection. This year, our class is going to focus on 3 documents: two journals by Thomas Adams (1853-1855) and a recently acquired diary by an officer on John Macomb's Utah expedition of 1859. Spend some time glancing through the materials to select a passage that interests you. Later, after following the registration process below, you will need to claim your pages. Transcribe just the first few words from at least three (substantive) manuscript pages. That way, you will claim them, as your own, and others will not select them.

2. EXAMINE YOUR DOCUMENT.

Register for a research account (<https://library.princeton.edu/aeon/>) and visit the Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) reading room to review the available material and select a specific collection or journal for your assignment. Take notes on the material you select so that you can describe its appearance in your paper. Think about how the material form and condition of a document can help you better understand it as a primary source document.

Keep careful notes of what you can learn from looking at the original. Is it bound? Folded? Does it show evidence of having been sent through the mail? For whose eyes was it intended? Does it show any evidence of having been written in a particular place? What kind of condition is it in? How does it fit into the large collection of which it is a part?

In selecting your document, think about how you might write about it. Does it give you insight into a particular group of people? A particular place? A particular kind of

travel? Does it appear as part of a larger story that you can flesh out in your paper? Does it elucidate an experience that you could explore in a larger way?

3. TRANSCRIBE YOUR DOCUMENT.

A. Register for the course transcription website:

<http://transcribe.princeton.edu/courseinfo>

B. After registering, go to the course transcription website and log in:

<http://transcribe.princeton.edu/scripto/index/login>

C. View the Transcription Guidelines before you begin:

<http://transcribe.princeton.edu/transcription-guidelines>

D. Select the document you want to work on:

<http://transcribe.princeton.edu/collections/show/1>

Select the equivalent of three manuscript pages that are labeled as Not Started (those pages marked as Needs Review have already been transcribed). Please note that while you are transcribing only a small part of the document, and contributing your work to our larger crowdsourcing transcription project, your paper can focus on the entire manuscript or even a section of previously transcribed pages.

E. Transcribe your three pages. To save your transcriptions to the site, click the “Save Transcription” tab before advancing to the next page. While transcribing, make certain to review the “Transcription Guidelines” (link provided next to the “Save Transcription” tab). To copy your transcriptions so that they can be submitted as a part of your paper, copy the text into a Word document and include the image number of the file in the Transcription Website.

4. ASSEMBLE A BIBLIOGRAPHY.

What will you need to know to make sense of your document? We’ve placed a handful of useful books on library reserve (John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*; John D. Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West*; and Merrill Mattes, *Platte River Road Narratives*).

But you will need additional resources based on your topic. Perhaps you’ll need to learn more about the California Gold Rush, the Pacific Railroad Survey, or settlement in Oregon. Find the books and other resources that will help you develop your topic. You may also want to explore Ancestry.com if you are trying to do more genealogical research on your subject.

5. WRITE YOUR PAPER.

Your paper should make use of your particular document to tell a larger story about the period. It can go in any number of directions. You might use it to speak about the relationships between family members, the economics of the gold rush, the minutiae of overland travel. Be creative. Even a letter that complains of boredom can be interesting! Please note: your paper should also incorporate anything you've gleaned from looking at the original manuscript in Firestone.