



# Guide to the Timothy H. O'Sullivan Photographs, 1868-1873

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This collection guide was produced in .

This PDF version was created on **April 3, 2026**.

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

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## Table of Contents

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<a href="#">Summary</a> .....	3
<a href="#">Background</a> .....	4
<a href="#">Administrative Information</a> .....	6
<a href="#">Related Materials</a> .....	7
<a href="#">Names and Subjects</a> .....	8
<a href="#">Collection Inventory</a> .....	8
<a href="#">King Expeditions Series, 1868-1872</a> .....	8
<a href="#">Wheeler Expeditions Series, 1871, 1873</a> .....	10

## Summary

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**Collection Title:**

Timothy H. O'Sullivan photographs, 1868-1873

**Creator:**

O'Sullivan, Timothy H., 1840-1882

**Abstract:**

Timothy H. O'Sullivan was an important early American photographer who participated in two geographical surveys of the American West. Collection includes thirty-five gold-toned albumen prints made from glass plate negatives. O'Sullivan made these photographs as part of the King and Wheeler surveys between 1868 and 1873. Main subjects of the photographs are geological and geographical features of Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. Collection also contains four photographs of mining operations and two photographs of the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico.

**Extent:**

1.6 Linear Feet  
35 Items

**Physical Location:**

For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.

**Language:**

English

**Language:**

Material in English

**Collection ID:**

RL.00982

**Permalink:**

<http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/osullivantimothyh/>

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], Timothy H. O'Sullivan Photographs, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Background

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### Scope and Content

During his brief career, Timothy H. O'Sullivan made many compelling photographs, and in doing so established himself as one of the most important figures in early American photography. This collection includes thirty-five gold-toned albumen prints, resulting from glass plate negatives O'Sullivan made as he photographed the American west for the King and Wheeler surveys between 1868 and 1873. The geological and geographical features of Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming are the subjects most heavily represented in this collection. The collection also contains four photographs of mining operations and two photographs of the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico. The collection is arranged into two series: the **King Expeditions Series** and the **Wheeler Expeditions Series**. Both series are arranged chronologically.

Clarence King's Expedition officially bore the title: "The Geological Exploration of the 40th Parallel." King planned to explore a hundred-mile wide swath from the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains across the Great Basin to the Rocky Mountains, eastern Colorado to the California line. This collection includes nine photographs from King's expeditions in 1868 (1), 1869 (6), and 1872 (2).

In 1871, George Montague Wheeler, topographical engineer, took charge of "The Survey of the Territory of the United States West of the 100th Meridian." The field work conducted for this survey involved fourteen trips during 1871-1879. The primary object of the survey was to complete topographical mapping of the country, much of it largely unexplored, but the scope of the work eventually extended to include exhaustive investigation of geological, zoological, and ethnological matters. Publication of the definitive Report upon United States Geographical Surveys West of the One-Hundredth Meridian took place between 1875 and 1889. O'Sullivan made photographs on several of these expeditions. This series includes 26 photographs, from the expeditions of 1871 (18) 1873 (8).

More so than other western expeditionary photographers, Timothy O'Sullivan explored alternative strategies of photographic composition. O'Sullivan created unique compositions through the conscious ordering and visual presentation of bold forms, which emphasized the abstract qualities of the landscape. Several photographs in this collection reveal the formal qualities of O'Sullivan's photographs. These images contrast with the great volume of more picturesque landscapes made by other western expeditionary photographers, although O'Sullivan did make a number of photographs that emphasized natural beauty over form. O'Sullivan was also interested in recording evidence of human interaction with the environment. For example THO.P17 juxtaposes the passing

of geological time with evidence of recent human explorations. A photograph also contained in this collection, and of intrinsic interest, THO.P15, reveals visible brush strokes providing evidence of the technique used to coat glass plate negatives.

## Biographical/Historical

### Chronology List

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
1840	Born in Ireland
circa 1856-1861	Apprenticed under Mathew Brady and Alexander Gardner
1861-1865	Photographed the Civil War, sometimes for Matthew Brady and Alexander Gardner
1867-1869, 1872	Photographed for the King Expedition
1870	Became photographer for the Darien Survey, which explored possible routes for the Panama Canal
1871, 1873-1875	Photographed for the Wheeler Expedition
1880	Appointed official photographer for the U.S. Treasury Department, but retired shortly thereafter for health reasons
1882 Jan. 14	Died at West Brighton, Staten Island, N.Y.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## **Administrative Information**

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### **Publication Statement**

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### **Access Restrictions**

Collection is open for research.

Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection.

All or portions of this collection may be housed off-site in Duke University's Library Service Center. The library may require up to 48 hours to retrieve these materials for research use.

Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library to use this collection.

### **Use Restrictions**

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

### **Acquisition Information**

The Timothy H. O'Sullivan Photographs were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a purchase in 1972.

These and other photographs by western expeditionary photographers were purchased from Lowdermilk's bookstore in Washington, D.C. prior to its liquidation.

### **Processing Information**

This collection was previously processed by Bill Erwin in 1982. Erwin conducted a great deal of research used to identify photographs made by western

expeditionary photographers. Every effort was made to retain both the organization and informational aspects of his work except when they conflicted with more modern practices.

Information folders contain copies of earlier catalog records and bibliographic information for related sources including sources in which these photographs have been published.

Additional folders contain photocopies of photographs annotated by the National Archives, and reference prints made from copy negatives held in this collection.

Quotation marks were used to indicate information taken directly from the photographs.

When photographs were identified as O'Sullivan's by comparison with negatives held at the National Archives the relevant negative number has been provided.

Processed by Chris Black, November 24, 2004

Encoded by Chris Black, Michael Shumate

Completed September 2006

Accession is described in this finding aid.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## **Related Materials**

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### **Related Material**

The following collections in the Duke University David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library may contain related material:

William Bell Photographs, 1872  
John K. Hillers Photographs, 1871-1889 and undated  
William Henry Jackson Photographs, 1869-1878 and undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Names and Subjects

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- Photographs
- Albumen prints
- West (U.S.) -- Pictorial works
- West (U.S.) -- Discovery and exploration
- Southwest, New -- Pictorial works
- Southwest, New -- Discovery and exploration
- Landscape photography -- West (U.S.)
- Photographers
- Documentary Photography
- O'Sullivan, Timothy H., 1840-1882
- O'Sullivan, Timothy H., 1840-1882
- Wheeler, George M. (George Montague), 1842-1905
- Geographical Survey (U.S.)
- King, Clarence, 1842-1901

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## Collection Inventory

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### King Expeditions Series, 1868-1872

**Physical Description:** 1 box

1868 "120" (lower right corner) Lake Marian,  
Summits of East Humboldt Mountains, Nevada                      Box THO.1 > Print THO.P1

**Physical Description:** 8 x 11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: similar to No. 123 in American Frontiers, p. 83, but from a different angle.)

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1869 "16" (lower left corner) Echo Canyon,  
Utah. Tertiary Bluffs.    Box THO.1 > Print THO.P2

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: comparison with Plate 63, Vol. I, of bound photographs of King Survey, National Archives)

**Scope and Contents**

National Archives Number: 77-KN-16

1869 "18" (lower right corner) Tertiary  
Conglomerates, Weber Valley, Utah. Box THO.1 > Print THO.P3

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: In American Frontiers, p.69)

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1869 Tertiary Conglomerates, Weber Valley,  
Utah. Box THO.1 > Print THO.P4

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: by comparison with THO.P3)

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1869 Cottonwood Lake, Wasatch Range, Utah. Box THO.1 > Print THO.P5

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: In American Frontiers, p. 100, but from a different angle)

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The Falls of the Provo in Utah. Probably 1869. Box THO.1 > Print THO.P6

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: similar to No. 102 in Timothy O'Sullivan, America's Forgotten  
Photographer, p. 176.)

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Mount Agassiz in Utah. Probably 1869. Box THO.1 > Print THO.P7

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: different angle from view in Timothy O'Sullivan, America's Forgotten  
Photographer, p.178)

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1872 Cañon of Lodore, Green River, Wyoming. Box THO.1 > Print THO.P8

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: comparison with Plate 51, Vol.1, of bound photographs of King  
Survey, National Archives. Original negative number was 72.)

1872 "50" (lower right corner) Horseshoe Canyon, Green River, Wyoming. Box THO.1 > Print THO.P9

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

(source: the lower left corner of this photograph matches part of the scene in the view on p. 99 in American Frontiers. Silting on the edges of the river is identical.)

**Alternative Form Available:**

copy negative available: THO.N9

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### Wheeler Expeditions Series, 1871, 1873

**Physical Description:** 3 boxes

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1871 "No. 1. Snow Peaks, Bull Run Mining District, Nevada" Box THO.1 > Print THO.P10

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1871 "No. 4. Black Cañon, Colorado River, Looking Below From Big Horn Camp" Box THO.1 > Print THO.P11

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1871 "No. 6. Black Cañon, Colorado River, Looking Below, Near Camp 7" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P12

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**Alternative Form Available:**

copy negative available: THO.N12

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1871 "No. 7. Black Cañon, Colorado River, Looking Below, Near Camp 7" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P13

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1871 "No. 10. Entrance to Black Cañon, Colorado River" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P14

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1871 "No. 12. Cereus Giganteus, Arizona" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P15

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

1871 "No. 13. Water Rhyolites, Near Logan Springs, Nevada" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P16

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1871 "No. 14. Rock Carved by Drifting Sand, Below Fortification Rock, Arizona" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P17

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1871 "No. 15. Iceberg Cañon, Colorado River, Looking Above" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P18

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1871 "No.16. Alpine Lake in the Sierra Nevada, California" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P19

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**General note**

Appears as a print in Wheeler's Report upon United States Geographical Surveys West of the One Hundreth Meridian Vol. I, p. 40 (plate II).

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1871 "No. 94. Music Mt. From Truxton Springs, A. T., Arizona Series" Box THO.2 > Print THO.P20

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1871 No. 7. Fifteen Stamp Mill, Mineral Hill, Nevada Box THO.2 > Print THO.P21

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.5 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board.

**Scope and Contents**

National Archives number: 106-WB-29

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1871 No.13. Canfield's Mill, Belmont, Nevada Box THO.2 > Print THO.P22

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.5 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board.

**Alternative Form Available:**

copy negative available: THO.N22

**Scope and Contents**

National Archives Number: 106-WB-13

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1871 No. 28. Quartz Formation near Silver Cañon, Pahranaget, Lake District, Nevada Box THO.2 > Print THO.P23

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.5 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board.

**Scope and Contents**

National Archives number 106-WB-27

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1871 No. 47. Meadow Valley Mining Co.'s Works, Dry Valley, Nevada Box THO.3 > Print THO.P24

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.5 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board.

**Scope and Contents**

National Archives number 106-WB-47

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1871 Combination Mill, Belmont, Nevada. Box THO.3 > Print THO.P25

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.5 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board.

**Scope and Contents**

National Archives number 106-WB-12

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1871 Death Valley, California. In Timothy O'Sullivan, America's Forgotten Photographer, p. 242 Box THO.3 > Print THO.P26

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.5 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board.

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1871 No. 65. Quartz Formation near Silver Cañon Pahranaget, Lake District Nevada. Or Part of Hyko Mining District Nevada. Left side overlaps with right side of No. 28 Box THO.3 > Print THO.P27

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**Scope and Contents**

National Archives number 106-WB-65

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1873 "No. 1. Apache Lake, Sierra Blanca Range, Arizona" Box THO.3 > Print THO.P28

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1873 "No. 2. View on Apache Lake, Sierra Blanca Range, Arizona" Box THO.3 > Print THO.P29

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1873 "No. 4. North Fork Cañon, Sierra Blanca Creek, Arizona" Box THO.3 > Print THO.P30

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

1873 "No. 8. Historic Spanish Record of the  
Conquest, South Side of Inscription Rock, N.M." Box THO.3 > Print THO.P31

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1873 "No. 12. Looking Across the Colorado  
River to Mouth of Paria Creek" Box THO.3 > Print THO.P32

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1873 "No. 16. Head of Cañon de Chelle,  
Looking Down, Walls about 1200 feet in  
height" [Arizona] Box THO.3 > Print THO.P33

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

**Alternative Form Available:**

copy negative available: THO.N33

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1873 "No. 17. Indian Pueblo, Zuni, N.M. View  
from the South" Box THO.3 > Print THO.P34

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

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1873 "No. 18. Old Mission Church, Zuni  
Pueblo, N.M. View from the Plaza" Box THO.3 > Print THO.P35

**Physical Description:** 8 x 10.75-11 inch print mounted on a 16 x 20 inch board

[Return to Table of Contents](#)