Boss, Charles.

Daily report of Charles Boss. Life and adventures on the frontiers. circa 1884-1893

Abstract: Fictionalized journal of Charles Boss describing his frontier life and encounters with Indians while serving in the United States Army from 1866 to 1884.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 097, Item 006

Creator: Boss, Charles.

Title: Daily report of Charles Boss. Life and adventures on the frontiers.

Inclusive Dates: circa 1884-1893

Extent: 1 v. (ca. 478 p.) ; 33 cm.

Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 097, Item 006, Daily report of Charles Boss. Life and adventures on the frontiers., Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Item 006: Shelved in SPEC MSS 097

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Source: Purchase, 1948.

Processing: Processed by Kate Hand, October 2007.

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Biographical Note

Charles Boss served as a private in the United States Army from 1866 to 1884. He first enlisted in the 11th U.S. Infantry, Company K, in Brooklyn, New York, on October 2, 1866. He was transferred to Company K of the 16th Infantry and then honorably discharged at Corinth, Mississippi, on October 2, 1869. He reenlisted in New York several weeks later. Boss served in the 22nd U.S. Infantry, Company F, until he was again honorably discharged on October 26, 1874. He reenlisted a month later in Michigan, was assigned to Company H, and was honorably discharged on November 19, 1879, in Fort Clarke, Texas. He reenlisted in Texas several weeks later, served in Company H, and was honorably discharged December 8, 1884, at Fort Lewis, Colorado.

Charles Boss wrote his account during a time when the westward expansion of the U.S. frontier often led to hostility and violent confrontations between white settlers and Native Americans. During his military service, Boss participated in the Plains Wars and the Nez Percé War of 1877.

Sources:


Additional information derived from the collection.
Scope and Content Note

Charles Boss's journal is an embellished version of a diary he kept during his enlistment in the U.S. Army from 1869 to 1876. The volume also contains brief accounts of Boss's life both before and after his time in the military.

Charles Boss entitled his journal "Daily report of Charles Boss. Life and adventures on the Frontiers. Composed in Field, Jail, and Escapes, Prairie, Mountains Rivers, Indians, Pioniers, Robbers, and MurderStories, Theft and Desertion, District of Territories. Expeditions from 1869 to 1876." This title gives a fairly accurate list of the kinds of stories Boss recorded. He also includes descriptions of buffalo herds, prairie fires, criminals jailed at the fort, snowstorms and blizzards, encounters with the Indians, and daily accounts of weather and of his duties in the army. During his Army service, Boss describes life in each fort in which he resided or campaign in which he participated. Beginning in December 1869, Boss was stationed at Fort Sully, Fort Randall, Fort Stevenson, and Fort Rice in the Dakota Territory. In October 1873, he was sent to the Niobrara Settlement in Nebraska. In July 1876, he was sent to Fort Wayne in Detroit, Michigan. Boss then fought in the Nez Percé War which lasted until October 1877.

Boss's "Daily report" style of entry retains many elements of a diary. Most entries are dated. Occasionally, especially near the beginning of the volume, there is a series of dates with only short entries after them such as "Sic in quarters" or "No duty good Weather." It is probable that many such details from the journal are accurate and unexaggerated. Boss's daily actions, as well as short accounts of occurrences at the forts, seem extremely plausible. He provides verifiable facts, such as the names of other soldiers and officers as well as their location and infantry division.

Boss's journal also includes elements of a novel or work of fiction. The account is separated into titled sections. Some of the headings, such as "A narrow escape of Genr: D. S. Stanley" (p. 163) or "In Hell" (p. 329), seem designed not only to describe the contents of a section, but also to grab the reader's attention. The volume begins with a section entitled "Index" containing a numbered list of these headings. Boss also draws flourishes above and below each heading, imitating the appearance of a printed work. The language he uses occasionally mimics nineteenth-century fiction, such as "My dear reader' you can guess how he felt" (p. 113).

Furthermore, some parts of Boss's account seem exaggerated and extremely unlikely. He claims at one point the temperature dropped to forty-eight below zero (p. 3). In another section, he claims that twenty-five wolves entered a shack through its window to kill all the men inside (p. 5). In some of the longer, more narrative sections, Boss also describes events he could not have witnessed as described from someone else's point of view.

As the account progresses, it becomes less like a diary and more like a work of fiction. The section headings become longer and more elaborate. The sections become shorter and more prone to continuous narrative instead of separate dated entries. One particularly extended and dramatic account is a section entitled "A heroic Bohemian girl, or the Bruly Indians on the War-path." It graphically describes the brutal killing of a mother and her two children by Indians. The settlers then take refuge on an island while an eighteen-year-old girl sneaks away to get help. In the meantime, the Indians are about to successfully cross
the river and overwhelm the outnumbered Settlers when reinforcements arrive at the last moment. (pp. 270-289)

Boss includes several other highly dramatic sections. His personal adventures include being lost on the prairie and almost dying of thirst (pp. 166-72) and almost freezing to death in a blizzard but being saved by a dog (pp. 255-59). Two stories about others include "The full account of Genr. Custer Massacre" as told by an eyewitness who was supposedly a prisoner of Sitting Bull (pp. 297-98) and the story of "Liver-eating Johnson" and his grudge against the Indians for killing his family (pp. 355-59). Notably, Boss also offers an explanation for the aggression between Whites and Indians (pp. 401-403).

The last twenty pages of the volume are filled with poetry related to the contents of the journal. Some of the poems are attributed to other authors such as "Codys Corral. Or The Scout and the Sioux by ‘Buckskin Sam,’" "Billy Cody ‘by an old comrade,’” or "Why Poor Lil Mose left School. Poor lil Mose." Two other poems, "War's Humorous” and "Thar' was Jim,” are attributed to Captain Jack Crawford, who published both poetry and plays during the nineteenth century. "Thar' was Jim" was published in Campfire Sparks in 1893. Other poems-"The origin of the North American Indian. A legend," "An Interview with Death," "Our Huguenot Forefathers," "Punktown news. Worse then War. All kinds of Microbes Afloat," and "The Conversion of Burglar Bill"-are not attributed to anyone. This section also contains a "Sioux Indian Song" which is written phonetically and then translated into English.

Boss's journal has been rebound. His autograph entries are written in ink. Beginning about thirty pages into the account, page numbers have been either stamped or printed in blue ink. A colored lithograph hinting at much of the focus of Boss's journal faces the title page. It is captioned "Buffalo Bill to the Rescue" and attributed to "Avil Co. Lith. Phila. Copyrighted 1888." The lithograph depicts two frontiersmen or cowboys overlooking a cluster of covered wagons defended by men with rifles and encircled by Indians on horseback.

The owner of this journal attempted to publish it with the Oxford University Press in 1941. The press was initially excited about the manuscript, but after their readers ascertained that much of the account was fictionalized, they decided that they could not publish the journal. Copies of letters from the Oxford University Press as well as one reader's response are in a pocket at the back of the journal. The pocket also contains a copy of a letter from the U.S. Department of Labor describing Charles Boss's enlistment records. The originals of these letters are available by request in Special Collections. The original version of the diary kept by Boss can be found on microform at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.
Selected Search Terms

**Personal Names**

Boss, Charles--Diaries.
Buffalo Bill, 1846-1917.
Crawford, Jack, 1847-1917.
Custer, George Armstrong, 1839-1876.
Joseph, Nez Percé Chief, 1840-1904.
Sitting Bull, 1834?-1890.

**Corporate Names**

United States. Army. Infantry Regiment, 22nd.

**Additional Title**


**Topical Terms**

Dakota Indians--History--19th century.
Frontier and pioneer life--West (U.S.)--History--19th century.
Indians of North America--Wars--1866-1895.
Nez Percé Indians--History--19th century.
Soldiers--Diaries.
West (U.S.)--History, Military--19th century.

**Geographic Names**

Dakota Territory--Description and travel.
Dakota Territory--History--19th century.
Detroit (Mich.)--Description and travel.
Detroit (Mich.)--History--19th century.
Montana--Description and travel.
Montana--History--19th century.
Nebraska--Description and travel.
Nebraska--History--19th century.
West (U.S.)--Description and travel.
West (U.S.)--History--19th century.

Form/Genre Terms

Diaries.
Poetry.
Autofiction.

Occupation

Soldiers.

Related Materials in Other Repositories

MM 95083477, Papers of Charles Boss, 1866-1881, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

Related Materials in this Repository

This item forms part of MSS 097 Diaries, Journals, and Ships' Logs collection.

Publication Note

Detailed Description of the Collection

Daily report of Charles Boss. Life and adventures on the Frontiers., circa 1884-1893 [Item 006]

1 vol.