FRONTIER LIFE
Borderlands, Settlement & Colonial Encounters
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OVERVIEW
The settling of vast areas of the world by Europeans has left a particular and lasting influence on history. Frontier Life captures the experiences of people living on the edge of European settlement across the frontiers of North America, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Through a huge array of digitised primary source materials, it documents the relationships and interaction between new arrivals and indigenous peoples, and the results of these encounters: the creation of new states and trade networks, internal migration, and the marginalisation and decline of indigenous peoples.

Frontier Life brings together documents from sixteen archives and libraries around the world. Following the archival practices of the source libraries, each item has been put in a sub-collection with other, similar, material. Letters, diaries, government papers, books, artwork, photographs, business papers and maps are among the types of source material to be found within the collection. The geographical spread of these documents allows users to focus on a particular region, such as Canada, while viewing it within a wider global, comparative context.

KEY THEMES
Listed within this document are the major thematic areas covered by the Frontier Life collection. In each case a short overview of the theme is provided, together with one example of the many sub-collections and documents that relate to that theme. Both the Canadian perspective, and the wider, global context, are referenced.
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Indigenous peoples and their encounters with European settlers and their descendants are central to this collection. From government treaties to personal interaction, it was the meeting of cultures that often defined the frontier.

Example sub-collection: Red River Settlement census returns sent to the Governor and Committee includes census information on First Nations people and European settlers in the region. Each head of family is given, with their age, country of birth, marital status, number and sex of dependants, number of buildings, livestock, farm equipment, river craft and acres of land cultivated.

Highlighted documents: Indenture between Selkirk and the Chiefs and Warriors of the Saulteaux and Cree nations and Correspondence, - 1908. - Re: petition listing First Nations of Canada’s demands relating to conditions in region of Peace River Crossing. These two documents bookend the First Nations’ experience of the frontier. The first records the deed of sale of Red River, with signatures of the First Nation leaders. The second, almost one hundred years later, is a letter to the Indian Commissioner about the living conditions of First Nations people.

The wider context: The Ely Samuel Parker Papers from the American Philosophical Society are 586 documents covering Parker’s work on the history and language of the Seneca, and his work with the U.S. Government on behalf of Seneca groups. The Papers of Zaccheus Macy, 1641-1792, from the Massachusetts Historical Society, and Abel Janney’s narrative of his capture by Shawnee Indians, from the St Louis Mercantile Library, give first-hand accounts of life with indigenous people. A more administrative view is provided by Arthur Phillip’s dispatches relating to the settlement of Australia and his first encounters with indigenous peoples.
BUSINESS, TRADE & COMMERCE
The impact and conduct of economic activity, including trade with indigenous peoples, is well represented in this resource.

Example sub-collection: The material digitised from the Hudson's Bay Company Archives provides an exceptional level of information on the Canadian fur trade. Topics covered range from trading relationships with First Nations people, the organisation of company forts and settlements, and personal accounts of the people who settled and worked in areas controlled by the company.

Highlighted document: North West Company English River District journal and account book documents the activities of the company in the region, and includes a list of Cree words for trading goods, as well as records of transactions and journal entries of employees.

The wider context: The Robert Campbell Family Collection / Campbell Fur Trade papers from St Louis Mercantile Library and the Fur Trade Collection from Missouri History Museum offer a large range of material on the fur trade outside of Canada.

RELIGION
European religious exiles saw the expanding frontier as an opportunity to escape persecution or start new lives under their own spiritual guidelines. More established religious groups found themselves faced with millions of potential converts among the indigenous peoples, and began extensive missionary work.

Example sub-collection: Documents relating to John West from the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, including the John West Journal sub-collection.

Highlighted document: Rev. John West Journal: “The British North West American Indians, with Free Thoughts on the Red River Settlement”. This is the diary of Reverend John West, a chaplain to the Hudson's Bay Company, which gives details of his work with people of the First Nations, as well as daily life and the landscapes he encountered.

The wider context: Father Narciso Durán letters (1806-1827) and other correspondence taken from the California Historical Society provide information on Spanish missionary work in California. Several volumes from The National Archives, UK, including Expedition to the Niger to abolish Slave Trade: Commissioners Trotter, Allen and Webb: Printed Reports and Colonel Collins’ report on the frontier districts, discuss missionary activities in nineteenth-century Africa.
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GOVERNMENT & POLITICS
Exercising political power in frontier regions could be difficult and existed at two main levels; the local and metropolitan. The dynamics of settler and colonial government and its relationship to these regions is covered well in this resource.

Example sub-collection: The Edgar Dewdney papers consist of correspondence, reports, appointments, speeches, diaries and news clippings pertaining to the Dewdney Trail and his early career in British Columbia as Lieutenant-Governor, Minister of the Interior and Indian Commissioner of the North-West Territories.

Highlighted document: Drafts to Sir George Arthur: Letters to Sir George Arthur as governor in Upper Canada. They cover his appointment, costings, relations with First Nations people, land, and settlement.

The wider context: The Colonial Office documents digitised from The National Archives, UK, offer a perspective on government across the Anglophone frontier, from Australia and New Zealand, to Southern and Western Africa.

WARFARE & MILITARY HISTORY
War was a regular feature of the frontier and manifests itself in these documents through conflict between indigenous peoples and settlers, conflict between indigenous peoples and governments, conflict between settlers and governments, and war between European states.

Example sub-collection: The Riel Rebellion Telegram Fonds is a collection of telegrams received at the Canadian Pacific Railway’s Winnipeg office during the 1885 Riel Rebellion. The railway was used for government troop movements, and the telegrams were a vital source of communication. They cover subjects such as troop movements, the rebels, the participation of First Nations groups, local settlers, the weather, and battles in the North-West.

Highlighted document: Address of welcome to Chiefs Pakan, Samson and Jonas from the citizens of Orilla. This was an address, delivered by the citizens of Orilla, to the local First Nations people, who fought for the crown during the Riel Rebellion. The First Nations are praised for their patriotic and peaceful conduct.

The wider context: A number of sub-collections deal with settler-government disputes. The Eberstadt Collection from the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, and items such as the Lilly Library Texana-Mexico Broadsides, have information on the Texas Revolution. The George Rogers Clark Papers and David Cobb Papers offer two views of the American Revolutionary War.
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AGRICULTURE & LIVESTOCK
Many of the Europeans who moved to the frontier were engaged in farming, both for subsistence and commercially. Indeed, it was often the promise of good agricultural land that drew them to the frontier in the first place. The practicalities of farming and experiences of the people who set up new farms therefore form a key component of this resource.

Example sub-collection: The Cochrane Ranche Company Ltd documents from the Glenbow Museum are a set of notebooks, diaries and letters that offer an insight into the running of a Canadian ranch in the nineteenth century.

Highlighted document: Complementing these written documents are photographs showing Views of Bow River Horse Ranche near Cochrane, which date from the same period.

The wider context: The Goodnight Papers sub-collection from the Dolph Briscoe Centre for American Research gives insight into ranching in Texas. Government reports from The National Archives, UK provide information on agriculture in New South Wales and the Cape of Good Hope, while the Baja California papers from UC San Diego include notes on agriculture and viticulture in the region.
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WOMEN’S HISTORY
Much of the material in this collection was generated by men, and some common tropes of womanhood do come through, but the vast array of material collated in Frontier Life allows the changing lifestyles, roles, and spheres of women’s history to emerge. Documents that feature women as interpreters, emigrants and entrepreneurs exist alongside those that focus on domestic life.

Example sub-collection: Edwards, Gardiner Family sub-collection, from the Glenbow Museum, contains the papers of Henrietta Muir Edwards, a prominent member of the women’s rights movement in Canada. It includes letters, diaries, photographs and a published essay, Legal Status of Women in Canada.

Highlighted document: Henrietta Muir’s speech, September 1906. This was given by Henrietta to the National Council of Women. Due to its fragile nature, access to the original is restricted, making this digital copy especially important.

The wider context: There are documents within Frontier Life that show women expanding the social and professional spheres within which they operated – from founding schools, to writing histories of indigenous peoples. The Margaret Borland Papers concern the female owner of one of the largest cattle ranches in Texas, while the Diaries of Minnie G. Starke and Frances Simpson’s Journal demonstrate further the role of women in business.

INDUSTRY & TECHNOLOGY
The impact of mining on the land and migration is covered across multiple frontiers, with various examples of gold rushes providing a particular focus. Alongside this industrial phenomenon came the development of transport, such as the railroad, and communications, like the telegraph.

Example sub-collection: Bartsch Family sub-collection, containing materials relating to the Klondike Gold Rush.


The wider context: The memoirs of James L. Frisk, from the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, and personal diaries and letters of Jacob Bartholomew, James Wilson Temple, Medorem Crawford and John E. Jones, all from the Lilly Library, are among the many documents covering the gold rushes in California, Oregon and Montana. Letters and reports from The National Archives, UK, provide similar material for gold in South Africa and minerals in Swaziland.
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LAW & ORDER
The frontier was often a place of violence and disorder and the documents discuss policing and attempts at establishing a European legal framework in these areas.

Example sub-collection: Macleod, James F. Family sub-collection, which contains the papers of the Assistant Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police when the organisation was first established.

Highlighted document: North-West Mounted Police diary. -- July-November 1896. As well as the Macleod papers, the Glenbow collections have provided a number of diaries of men who served in the NWMP, including this transcript of Kristjan Fjeldsted Anderson's diary.

The wider context: Reports and dispatches from officials such as Arthur Phillip, William Bligh and Philip Gidley King offer comparative material from Australia, while the Ellison Manuscripts from the Lilly Library feature information on Edward Bonney's encounters with gangs of outlaws on the United States' frontier.

FURTHER THEMES TO BE EXPLORED WITHIN FRONTIER LIFE

Arts & Entertainment: occasional glimpses are offered of life beyond the practicalities of survival, business and government. Poetry, music, plays and games are all mentioned, with the artwork of the frontier being a particular highlight within this thematic area.

Children & Family: the familiar dramas of marriage, childbirth and death played out on the frontiers as elsewhere, and are recorded throughout this resource. From love letters and fatherly advice to children, to family photographs and information on education and schooling, various aspects of familial life are documented here.

Exploration, Expeditions & Travel: The exploration by Europeans of the lands of indigenous peoples was often the most dramatic moment of contact on the frontier. This theme is well represented here in the form of Lewis and Clark's American journeys and the Niger Expedition, among other examples.

Health & Medicine: Sickness was a common feature of these regions, and the exchange of diseases had a huge impact on indigenous people in particular. The documents in Frontier Life offer some insight into health and medicine, with the wellbeing of Europeans usually the chief concern of the authors.

Land & Property: The desire for land among incoming peoples was huge and the documents here discuss the acquisition, forced or otherwise, of land from indigenous peoples, and the systematisation of property from what the settlers often thought of as the ‘wilderness’.

Natural World: The natural world was not just the backdrop for the interplay of mixing cultures and societies, but also a source of wonder, discovery and practical help for the Europeans moving through the frontiers. Expeditions aimed at scientific discovery and a thirst for knowledge is very much in evidence here.
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SOURCE ARCHIVES
American Philosophical Society
California Historical Society
Dolph Briscoe Center for American History
Earlham College Friends Library
Glenbow Museum
Guilford College
Hudson’s Bay Company Archives Library, Archives of Manitoba
Lilly Library, Indiana University
Massachusetts Historical Society
Missouri History Museum
Museum of Old Domestic Life
Royal Commonwealth Society Collections at Cambridge University Library
St. Louis Mercantile Library
State Library of New South Wales
The Manitoba Museum
The National Archives, UK
University of California, San Diego
University of Melbourne Library

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

Frontier Life Map-Chronology: An interactive map which situates events in time and space in order to contextualise the frontier between European, European-American and European-Australasian people and the indigenous inhabitants of North America, Africa and Australasia. Users can explore the frontier by clicking on points on the map or events on the timeline. Each entry has a set of keywords that lead back to relevant documents within the collection.
Video Interviews: Talking Frontiers: Five members of the editorial board give video interviews in which they answer questions about how we define frontiers and why the study of them is important.

Museum of Frontier Culture: A slideshow that allows the user to see the transition of a Virginian farmhouse from a frontier settlement into a more permanent dwelling.

Academic Essays: There are seven essays written by members of our editorial board that help to introduce the study of frontiers and the documents within this collection.

EDITORIAL BOARD

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