

Guide to the Alfred Sully Papers

WA MSS S-1311



by Susie R. Bock

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P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: WA MSS S-1311

CREATOR: Sully, Alfred, 1821-1879

TITLE: Alfred Sully papers

DATES: 1816-1974

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 4 linear feet (10 boxes + 1 broadside)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers document the career of an United States Army officer who served on the western frontier. The papers contain correspondence between Sully, his family, and colleagues, army records from Sully's positions at posts in California and the northern plains, as well as records from his appointment as Superintendent of the Indians for the Territory of Montana. There are some personal papers and research material on Alfred Sully gathered by his grandson Langdon Sully as he wrote the biography, *No Tears for the General*.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.sully>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.sully>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Langdon Sully, 1976.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Box 10: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Use

The Alfred Sully Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Alfred Sully Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

ALFRED SULLY, (1821-1879)

Alfred Sully, son of Thomas Sully the portrait painter, was born in Philadelphia. He graduated from West Point in 1841 and was commissioned a 2d lieutenant in the 2d Infantry Regiment. Sully spent a year at Fort Russell in Florida fighting the Seminole Indians before being assigned to Madison Barracks, Sackett's Harbor, New York, where he stayed from 1842-46. He joined the American forces in Mexico in time to participate in the siege of Vera Cruz. In 1847 Sully was promoted to 1st lieutenant.

In 1848 the 2d Infantry Regiment was ordered to California and stationed first in Monterey and then Benicia. Sully, now quartermaster and a captain, participated in Indian campaigns in northern California and southern Oregon. He married Manuela Jimeno in 1850 and the couple had a son in 1851; however, both mother and child died that year.

From 1854 to 1861 Sully served on the northern plains where he encountered the Northern Cheyenne and Sioux. He commanded troops in the Dakota and Nebraska Territories near Fort Pierre, Fort Kearney, and Fort Ridgely, Minnesota. In 1861 Sully was ordered to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to recruit forces for the Union and to drive the rebels out of St. Joseph and Independence, Missouri. The following year, as colonel and later brigadier general of the 1st Minnesota Volunteers, Sully fought in the Virginia Peninsula campaign.

By 1863 Sully was back on the plains serving under General Pope. From 1863 to 1866 he commanded the "North Western Indian Expeditions" directed against the Arapaho, Sioux, and Cheyenne. The battles of White Stone Hills and Tah-kah-ha-kuty (or Killdeer Mountain) proved Sully's skill as an Indian fighter, and when the Congressional Joint Special Committee to Inquire into the Condition of the Indian Tribes, often referred to as the Doolittle committee, came west, Sully was asked to testify.

In 1866 Sully married Sophia Henrietta Webster, was mustered out of the Volunteers, and returned to the regular army with the rank of lieutenant colonel. He spent his last years serving on various special projects. He chaired a commission to investigate the Fetterman Massacre at Fort Kearney and to establish peace with the Indians of the Powder River country. In 1869 he became Superintendent of Indians for the Territory of Montana and in 1877 served briefly with General Howard in the Nez Percé war. Alfred Sully died in 1879 at Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory.

For additional information see Langdon Sully's biography of his grandfather, *No Tears for the General: The Life of Alfred Sully, 1821-1879* (1974), a copy of which can be found in Box 7, folder 124.

Scope and Contents

The Alfred Sully Papers document the career of an United States Army officer who served on the western frontier. Although the collection spans the years 1816-1974, the bulk of the material dates from 1842-70.

Series I, *Correspondence*, contains letters between Alfred Sully and family and colleagues. *Military Papers*, Series II, consists of army records and Sully's financial papers. Both series are arranged chronologically. Sully's private notes, his artwork, and photographs can be found in Series III, *Personal Papers*. Series IV, *Family Papers* documents Langdon Sully's research for *No Tears for the General*. This series also contains a few miscellaneous papers related to Albert W. Sully, Alfred Sully's son by his second wife.

[Correspondence](#) (Box 1) contains both family letters and communications between officers. There is very little information on Sully's experiences in Florida and Mexico. In the 1840s, Sully's letters to his father Thomas Sully and his sisters describe garrison life in northern New York, while his correspondence with other officers focuses on recruiting duty in Buffalo. Later letters portray California before and during the gold rush. Sully praised Spanish society, including the old missions, and denounced the lawlessness resulting from mass immigration. A major problem for the army was the desertion of troops to the gold mines. Bitter complaints about military salaries are a recurring theme in his letters. Sully's letters from 1850 are filled with news of his new wife, her wealthy, aristocratic Spanish family, and the birth of their son. In March 1853 Sully wrote about Indian troubles in the Sierra Nevadas blaming "rascally whites" and "Pikes county men" for the uprisings.

Although there are not many letters for the period 1854-60, the correspondence for 1861 provides an interesting view of the frontier just before the Civil War. As a regular army officer, Sully complained about civilians being given commands and understood the resignations of southern officers. His letters describe the assembling of Union and Confederate troops and early skirmishes. In 1865 Sully was ordered to Washington where he searched for a command. Again his letters home criticize the army, bemoaning the politics of promotion and command. Sully's letters from the battlefield narrate events and comment on General McClellan's command.

Series I contains few family letters after 1862. Sully's correspondence in 1863-64 with General Pope and fellow officers discusses the "North Western Indian Expeditions." He also communicated with Spencer Baird of the Smithsonian Institution, for which he collected specimens during his campaigns. Indian affairs dominate Sully's letters for this period. A letter from Pierre Jean De Smet in 1866 discusses Indian missions. Correspondence for 1865-66 documents Sully's fight against charges of mistreating Indians brought by Walter A. Burleigh, an Indian agent, and involving an officer of inferior grade, Col. S. W. Pollock.

Sully's correspondence is sporadic after 1866. He sent a long autobiographical letter to a Pennsylvania historian on July 2, 1872. In 1877 Sully's letters to his wife describe his role as outfitter for General Howard's campaigns. To his sister Blanche he wrote about family life at Fort Vancouver.

[Series II, Military Papers](#) (Boxes 2-4) contains a variety of records: orders, reports, accounts, receipts, invoices, muster rolls, official letters, commissions, legal papers, and Sully's financial papers. As army officers often purchased supplies on the basis of future reimbursement, it is difficult to distinguish private bills from official records. Little of this material was used by Langdon Sully when writing *No Tears for the General*.

Most of the papers for 1842-45 are personal in nature, such as receipts for clothing, art supplies, and liquor. For 1846 there are recruiting records: expense accounts and orders. This series also provides a great deal of information on army life in early California. Sully kept records on garrison equipment, transportation expenses, and civilian labor.

Similar information can be found for the 1860s, when Sully was on the northern plains. Affidavits, letters of complaint, and special orders document the investigation of Sully for abusing Indians. These legal records describe the 1864 "North Western Indian Expedition" and life around Fort Randall, Dakota Territory. Sully commanded the Brackett's Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, the 6th and 7th Iowa Cavalry, 2d Nebraska Cavalry, and the 4th U.S. Volunteers; however the papers only refer to the Iowa and Minnesota regiments.

There is less information about 1865, although one report describes the topography of the area the expedition traversed (Box 2, folder 55).

Military Papers record the interaction between the federal government and the Indians of the Dakota Territory. Sully's written testimony to the Doolittle commission documents his opinion of federal Indian policy (Box 2, folder 53). Among the papers for 1865 are reports of a conference between Governor Newton Edmunds and the Two Kettles band, and Sully's meeting with the Rees (Arikara), Gros Ventres (Hidatsa), and Mandans. Finally, there are some records of the commission investigating the Fetterman Massacre.

As Superintendent of Indians for the Territory of Montana 1869-70 Sully was in charge of agencies for the Crow, Flathead (Salish), Blackfeet (Siksika), Gros Ventres (Atsina or Arapaho), and Bannock. The papers document buying, transporting, and distributing supplies to the Indians. There are contracts for the construction and maintenance of agencies, as well as reports on camp equipment.

Series II contains five maps. Sully owned a nineteenth century photoreproduction of a Virginia map made by the army engineers which he probably used during the Civil War (Box 8, folder 131). Also in collection is the map "Indian Territory with part of the adjoining state of Kansas, etc." printed by the Engineer Bureau of the War Department (Box 3, folder 56). Three other maps, all hand-drawn date from the 1860s-70s: "Map of region of country near the Yellowstone" showing the head of the river, a series of maps in notebook form, and a map of the conjunction of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington (Box 3, folder 69, Box 8, 136).

[Series III, Personal Papers](#) (Boxes 5 and 9) consists of notes, a watercolor, and photographs. The notes concern the reorganization of the army and other miscellaneous topics. Sully was an amateur painter, and the collection contains his framed watercolor depicting a Mexican battle as well as photographs of Sully's oil paintings. Other photographs depict scenes from Sully's years in the Dakota and Montana Territories.

Papers relating to Albert W. Sully and Langdon Sully can be found in [Series IV, Family Papers](#) (Boxes 6-7). Langdon Sully, author of *No Tears for the General*, transcribed many of Sully's letters and some of his military papers and collected material from the National Archives.

[Oversize](#) box 8 consists mostly of military papers.

The [restricted fragile papers](#) in Box 10 consist of originals for which preservation photocopies have been made.

Two other collections in the Yale Collection of Western Americana contain materials related to Alfred Sully's career. The George Washington Patten collection contains original drawings and watercolors by Alfred Sully. More information on the "North Western Indian Expeditions" can be found in the Records of the Quartermaster Department of the 4th U.S. Volunteers ("Galvanized Yankees"), who served under Sully.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1816-1879

0.5 linear feet (1 box)

0.5' (1 Box)

Series I, *Correspondence*, housed in Box 1, contains letters to and from Alfred Sully arranged chronologically.

b. 1, f. 1	Correspondence	1816 Apr 30
b. 1, f. 2	Correspondence See also: Oversize, Box 8, folder 124	1837-38
b. 1, f. 3	Correspondence	1842
b. 1, f. 4	Correspondence	1843
b. 1, f. 5	Correspondence	1844
b. 1, f. 6	Correspondence	1845
b. 1, f. 7	Correspondence	1846
b. 1, f. 8	Correspondence	1847-48
b. 1, f. 9	Correspondence	1849
b. 1, f. 10	Correspondence	[1840s]
b. 1, f. 11	Correspondence	1850
b. 1, f. 12	Correspondence	1851
b. 1, f. 13	Correspondence	1852
b. 1, f. 14	Correspondence	1853
b. 1, f. 15	Correspondence	1856-57
b. 1, f. 16	Correspondence	1859
b. 1, f. 17	Correspondence	1861
b. 1, f. 18	Correspondence	1862
b. 1, f. 19	Correspondence	1863
b. 1, f. 20	Correspondence	1864
b. 1, f. 21-22	Correspondence	1865
b. 1, f. 23	Correspondence	1866
b. 1, f. 24	Correspondence	1867-69
b. 1, f. 25	Correspondence	1870
b. 1, f. 26	Correspondence	1871-74

b. 1, f. 27	Correspondence	1877
b. 1, f. 28	Correspondence	1879, [1870s]
b. 1, f. 29	Correspondence	n.d.

Series II: Military Papers, 1842-1878*1 linear foot (3 boxes)**1.0' (3 Boxes)*

Series II, *Military Papers*, housed in Boxes 2-4, contains military records and some personal financial records arranged chronologically. Many of these documents are oversize and housed in Box 8. A metal container made for Sully's commissions is at the end of the series, although the commissions themselves are with the other papers.

b. 2, f. 30	Papers	1842-43
b. 2, f. 31	Papers	1845
b. 2, f. 32	Papers	1846
b. 2, f. 33	Papers	1847
b. 2, f. 34	Papers	1848
b. 2, f. 35	Papers	1849
b. 2, f. 36	Papers	1850
b. 2, f. 37	Papers	1851
b. 2, f. 38-39	Papers	1852
b. 2, f. 40-41	Papers	1853-1854
b. 2, f. 42	Papers	1854
b. 2, f. 43	Papers	1855
b. 2, f. 44	Papers	1856
b. 2, f. 45	Papers	1857
b. 2, f. 46	Papers	1858
b. 2, f. 47	Papers	1859
b. 2, f. 48	Papers	1860
b. 2, f. 49	Papers	1861
b. 2, f. 50	Papers	1862
b. 2, f. 51	Papers	1863
b. 2, f. 52	Papers	1864
b. 2, f. 53-55	Papers	1865
b. 3, f. 56-57	Papers	1866
b. 3, f. 58	Papers	1867
b. 3, f. 59-63	Papers	1869

b. 3, f. 64-65	Papers	1870
b. 3, f. 66	Papers	1872-73
b. 3, f. 67	Papers	1877-78
b. 3, f. 68-69	Papers	n.d.
b. 4, f. 70	Metal container for commissions	[1860s]

Series III: Personal Papers, 1864-1865*0.25 linear feet (1 box)**0.25' (1 Box)*Series III, *Personal Papers*, is housed in Box 5 and arranged alphabetically by subject.

b. 5, f. 71	Notes	n.d.
	Watercolor of Mexican War battle See: Oversize, Box 9, folder 138	
	Photographs	
b. 5, f. 72	Views of General Sully's headquarters in the field	[ca. 1864-65]
b. 5, f. 73	Scenes at Fort Berthold	[ca. 1865]
b. 5, f. 74	"Fort Rice"	1864
b. 5, f. 75	Iowa Cavalry, 6th and 7th	n.d.
b. 5, f. 76	Miscellaneous photographs	n.d.
b. 5, f. 77-78	Reproductions of Sully's paintings	n.d.
b. 5, f. 79	Miscellaneous	n.d.

Series IV: Family Papers, 1910-74*1 linear foot (2 boxes)**1.0' (2 Boxes)*

Series IV, *Family Papers*, housed in Boxes 6-7, is divided into two sections, *Albert W. Sully* and *Langdon Sully*. The second section contains research material for *No Tears for the General*.

ALBERT W. SULLY

b. 6, f. 80	Correspondence and autobiography	1910, 1916
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LANGDON SULLY

b. 6, f. 81-101	Transcripts of Alfred Sully's correspondence: 1837-70s	n.d.
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b. 6, f. 102-14	Transcripts of military papers relating to Alfred Sully: 1842-70, n.d.	n.d.
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b. 6, f. 115	Photocopies of Alfred Sully's personal papers: 1851, 1923	n.d.
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b. 6, f. 116-17	Photocopies of military papers relating to Alfred Sully: 1862-79 See also: Oversize, Box 8, folder 137	n.d.
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b. 6, f. 118	Photocopy of 1839 army regulations	n.d.
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Microfilm of Returns from Regular Army Regiments: from the National Archives

b. 7, f. 119	Guide to film	1968
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b. 7, f. 120	Rolls 18-19: 2d Infantry, 1849-60	n.d.
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b. 7, f. 121	Illustrations for <i>No Tears for the General</i>	n.d.
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b. 7, f. 122	<i>No Tears for the General</i>	1974
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b. 7, f. 123	Miscellaneous	n.d.
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Oversize*1 linear foot (2 boxes)**1.0' (2 Boxes)*

Oversize material is arranged by series.

CORRESPONDENCE

b. 8 (Oversize), f. 124	Correspondence	1838
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MILITARY PAPERS

b. 8 (Oversize), f. 125	Papers	1841
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 126	Papers	1847
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 127	Papers	1852
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 128	Papers	1854
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 129	Papers	1855, 1858
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 130	Papers	1860
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 132	Papers	1864-65
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 131	Papers	1862-63
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 133	Papers	1866-67
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 134	Papers	1869
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 135	Papers	1870, 1874
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 136	Papers	n.d.
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b. 8 (Oversize), f. 137	Papers	1855, 1858
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b. 11 (Broadside)	Papers	1855, 1858
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FAMILY PAPERS

Langdon Sully

FAMILY PAPERS > Langdon Sully (continued)

b. 8 (Oversize), f.
138 Photocopies of military papers: 1879

PERSONAL PAPERS

b. 9 (Oversize), f.
139 [Painting of Mexican War battle](#) n.d.

Restricted Fragile Papers*0.25 linear feet (1 box)**0.25' (1 Box)*

Box 10, *Restricted Fragile Papers*, contains originals arranged in folder order. The papers may only be seen with the permission of the appropriate curator.

Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

b. 10, f. 140	Box 1, folder 3	1842
b. 10, f. 141	Box 1, folder 5	1844
b. 10, f. 142	Box 1, folder 9	1849
b. 10, f. 143	Box 1, folder 13	1852
b. 10, f. 144	Box 1, folder 17	1861
b. 10, f. 145	Box 1, folder 21	1865
b. 10, f. 146	Box 1, folder 24	1869
b. 10, f. 147	Box 2, folder 33	1841
b. 10, f. 148	Box 2, folder 50	1862
b. 10, f. 149	Box 3, folder 65	1870

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Arapaho Indians
Arikara Indians
Crow Indians
Dakota Indians -- Wars, 1862-1865
Gros Ventre Indians (Montana)
Hidatsa Indians
Indian agents -- Montana
Indians of North America -- Government relations -- 1789-1869
Indians of North America -- Wars -- 1862-1865
Mandan Indians
Peninsula Campaign, 1862
Salish Indians
Santee Indians
Siksika Indians
Soldiers -- United States
Sully Expeditions, 1863-1865

Sully, Alfred, 1821-1879
Sully, Langdon
Sully, Thomas, 1783-1872

Corporate Bodies

United States. Army. Infantry Regiment, 2nd (1846-1847)
United States. Army (Military life)
United States. Congress. Joint Special Committee

Geographic Names

California -- History -- 1846-1850
Fort Berthold (N.D.)
Fort Randall (S.D.)
Fort Rice (N.D.)
Great Plains
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
West (U.S.) -- Description and travel

Genres / Formats

Affidavits -- United States
Military orders -- United States
Photoprints -- United States

Names

Burleigh, Walter A. (Walter Atwood), 1820-1896
Dimon, Charles Augustus Ropes, 1841-1902
Howard, O. O. (Oliver Otis), 1830-1909
McClellan, George B. (George Brinton), 1826-1885
Pollock, Samuel M.
Pope, John, 1822-1892