



Episode 805, Story 2: Bartlett's Sketchbook

Eduardo Pagan: Our next story asks how this sketchbook may have played a role in determining the shape of the United States. February 2, 1848. After nearly two years of battle, and almost 40,000 deaths, the Mexican-American War ends in a victory for the United States. Mexico loses more than half of its land. The U.S. increases its territory by more than a third. To secure the newly won territory, tens of thousands of settlers must be attracted to the often hostile and desert land. How would this monumental task be accomplished? More than 150 years later, Jeremy Rowe of Phoenix, Arizona, believes he may have stumbled on a rare artifact from this historic period.

Jeremy Rowe: As someone who loves the Southwest, this book really won me over.

Eduardo: I'm Eduardo Pagan, and I'm eager to see what Jeremy's discovered. Hi Jeremy, I'm Eduardo.

Jeremy: Hi Eduardo. Very nice to see you.

Eduardo: Very nice to meet you. Jeremy has an impressive collection of more than 30,000 early photographs and daguerreotypes from the Southwest.

Eduardo: This is really amazing.

Jeremy: Thank you. I've collected daguerreotypes and early photography for quite a while. But I've got something to show you that's not a photograph. It's an artist's sketchbook.

Eduardo: The sketchbook looks like something you'd carry in your pocket. These are really beautiful drawings. Where did you find this?

Jeremy: I was at a photo show in California. And a friend came up and mentioned he had something he thought might be of interest to me.

Eduardo: What was it in particular that caught your attention?



Jeremy: I think that...two things. The quality of the drawings was pretty impressive, I thought. And there was also a date: 1852. If the date is correct, these could be some of the earliest sketches of the southwest. In the sketchbook there are a number of names. There's a Mr. Cox, H. C. Pratt, and J. R. Bartlett. Since I know a little bit about Arizona history, Bartlett rang a bell.

Eduardo: Jeremy's research indicates that a J. R. Bartlett was involved in a government expedition sent to the Southwest in the 1850s to survey lands won from Mexico. He thinks his book may have been part of that survey. Well, what would you like me to find out for you?

Jeremy: I'd like to find out who actually did the sketches.

Eduardo: Well, let me do some digging around and I'll let you know what I can find out.

Jeremy: Sounds good, thank you.

Eduardo: The book looks like it's about three inches by five. It appears to be made out of leather. It's well worn. And there appears to be the remnants of a brass clasp. Oh, this is interesting. There's an old pencil that's still inside it. Even looks like it's been sharpened with a knife. The sketches are faint, but beautiful; they were clearly done by a talented artist. Inside there are dozens of sketches of landscapes, cactus, rivers. This is interesting. This sketch of a flower has numbers on it. And next to the numbers are corresponding colors. Like someone was planning on painting this flower later on. Well, at the beginning of this sketchbook, there appears to be a shopping list. Here it says, "Bought four vests, seven dollars and twenty-five cents. And, a pair of suspenders, fifty cents." It seems as if the owner was getting ready to take a trip. Perhaps it's that 19-century survey expedition that Jeremy mentioned. Victory in the Mexican-American war had won a vast new territory for the United States. The California coast clearly marked its western limits, but exactly where would the new border lie to the south? And who would the government hire to make such an important determination? John Russell Bartlett was appointed to the Commission for the Mexican Boundary Question by President Taylor in 1850. Before being made commissioner, the 45-year-old Bartlett was a bookseller in New York at the time and had authored a pioneering book on ethnology. It appears he was an artist, but the sketches I find don't look much like those in Jeremy's sketchbook. Hi Steve, I'm Eduardo. Steve Hansen is a chief



surveyor for the Arizona Bureau of Land Management. His office holds hundreds of documents from Southwest border and land surveys. I'm investigating this sketchbook that I believe might have been associated with the 1850 U.S.-Mexico boundary commission. The name J. R. Bartlett appears in here. As well as the date 1852.

Steve Hansen: Well, I haven't seen this book before. But I do know a little bit about the boundary survey between Mexico and the United States that took place around this time period.

Eduardo: Steve shows me a map of what the U.S. looked like when Bartlett did his survey.

Steve: Mexico, prior to the Mexican-American war, claimed all of this land up to the Oregon border. So Mexico, essentially after the war, ended up losing well over half of its territory. United States, on the other hand, ended up gaining about a third more. And that would have included all of California, all of Nevada, all of Utah, most of Arizona and New Mexico, plus portions of Colorado and Wyoming. This is a copy of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This is the treaty that ended the Mexican War. It was signed in 1848. And the treaty actually lays out terms for both the United States and Mexico to appoint both a surveyor and a commissioner, to go out there and actually mark that survey on the ground. And that's what Bartlett's mission was about.

Eduardo: But, Steve explains, the survey was also designed to entice settlers to the new land.

Steve: It would have been pretty foreign to people back east, to what it would look like. As a result, they had a scientific corps that described flora, fauna, wildlife, minerals, geology, all sorts of things like that.

Eduardo: Steve says Bartlett was walking into dangerous territory in more ways than one. The new land was also a stage on which the political conflicts consuming the rest of the country would be played out.

Steve: People back East were not sure whether new states created out of this new land would be free states or slave states. Of course, one of the final jobs of the boundary commission was to produce a final report.



Eduardo: So, if this sketchbook came from that expedition, it's possible that the sketches made their way into the final report?

Steve: Sure, that's...indeed possible. There's a lot of sketches in there.

Eduardo: Steve keeps a rare, original copy in his safe.

Steve: This is the final report of the Mexican and American Boundary Survey published in 1857.

Eduardo: May I?

Steve: Sure

Eduardo: Thank you. You know, these sketches are really fascinating. They paint a vivid portrait of the area. But they don't look much like the sketches that I'm investigating. And there's a further mystery... And...as I look at the title page, I don't see Bartlett's name anywhere.

Steve: No. I see Emory. I see some other names. But I certainly don't see Bartlett.

Eduardo: I've sent some images from our sketchbook to the editor of a Bartlett autobiography, Professor Jerry Mueller. He's asked me to meet him here at Picacho Peak State Park, just south of Phoenix. Jerry's spent more than 20 years retracing the route of John Russell Bartlett's original boundary survey.

Jerry Mueller: We're very near the trail that Bartlett took back in the summer of 1852. And they had covered approximately 2,000 miles, coming all the way from California. This is the spot I wanted to show you. Can I have your sketchbook for a minute?

Eduardo: Sure.

Jerry: Take a look at this two page pencil sketch. And you'll see that the topography on the sketch lines up very closely with the topography we have here in the back.



Eduardo: I can see that, that's a pretty good match. Jerry, I'm confused about one thing. I just saw a copy of the official boundary survey report. And none of these sketches were in there. Nor was Bartlett's name in there. Why?

Jerry: That's because Bartlett had been fired several years before the report came out.

Eduardo: Jerry explains that Bartlett had no previous background in surveying. But a few high ranking government connections landed him the boundary commissioner appointment...and an attractive \$3,000 annual salary.

Jerry: He accepted the position because he knew he could earn more money than he had ever had in his life. And also because, as an ethnologist, he wanted to be, as he said, 'thrown among the wild tribes of the interior.'

Eduardo: Instead, Bartlett found himself thrown among the wild tribes of the American political system, fighting over the great issue of the age: whether the newly-won territories should have slaves or not. Jerry explains how, because of an inaccurate map, Bartlett had fixed the border with Mexico some 30 miles north of where the U.S. wanted it. That angered politicians who wanted a railroad built on that less mountainous section of land to the south, in order to give southern states access to the new territories of the west.

Jerry: The problem with the boundary became an issue in the presidential election of 1852. And at that time, Franklin Pierce, a Democrat, won. And within two weeks of Pierce taking office, Bartlett was fired.

Eduardo: I ask Jerry if the sketches not appearing in the final report means we've hit a dead end.

Jerry: Well, actually, I want to have you take a look at this map of the Southwest. Because the sketches in that sketchbook cover the route that Bartlett took in late spring and summer of 1852.

Eduardo: Jerry explains the very distinct sequence.



Jerry: ...And we can start in San Diego, at the coast. And you'll notice there that we've got a nice drawing of the mission of San Diego. And the Boundary Commission left that area in late May of 1852, and came over here to Fort Yuma. And there's a nice drawing in here of the junction of the Gila and Colorado rivers at Fort Yuma.

Eduardo: In fact, Jerry has matched more than a dozen sketches in Jeremy's book with the survey mission. So it seems pretty conclusive that this sketchbook actually was on that journey.

Jerry: Definitely.

Eduardo: But who was the artist?

Jerry: My best guess is that it was Bartlett's official draftsman on the commission in 1852. And that would be Henry C. Pratt of Boston.

Eduardo: I know that name Pratt, it's one of the names Jeremy spotted inside the sketchbook. Jerry's not certain that Pratt was our artist, but he suggests I might get help at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island. Arizona State University Professor Gray Sweeney was the principal author of a comprehensive book on the artwork of Bartlett's boundary survey. Well, Gray, I believe it is very possible that this sketchbook belonged to an artist by the name of H. C. Pratt. What can you tell me about him?

Professor Gray Sweeney: He was a portrait and landscape artist based in Boston.

Eduardo: Gray tells me that Pratt's career began when Samuel Morse, a painter and the inventor of Morse code, saw Pratt's work on a barn door in New Hampshire and hired him as his assistant.

Gray: But his big claim to fame is that he was a close friend of the famous Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River school.

Eduardo: How did he wind up going along on this expedition?



Gray: Well, I think that Bartlett was looking for a topographical artist, and he needed someone who could document the scenes that they passed through. Pratt was available, he was capable, he was skilled and he really had the technique for making these close topographical drawings.

Eduardo: These sketches are so detailed they're almost like snapshots. Why didn't Bartlett take along a photographer instead?

Gray: Well, Eduardo, photography was in its infancy. And, it was still very cumbersome, very heavy. It would have taken a whole wagon just to transport the photographic equipment needed.

Eduardo: Do you think that this was by H. C. Pratt?

Gray: Actually, Eduardo. Let me show you.

Eduardo: Gray's located some artwork that might help: signed and dated Pratt sketches from the Brown Library collection.

Gray: This is a wonderful drawing by Pratt of John Russell Bartlett writing at his desk.

Eduardo: Fantastic. I've seen this image right here before.

Gray: Yes, that's---

Eduardo: The mission in San Diego.

Gray: ---that's the mission in San Diego.

Eduardo: There it is. That is almost identical, and here it's dated...

Gray: April, 1852, and signed Henry Cheever Pratt.

Eduardo: Which corresponds with the time that he was out on this expedition.



Gray: That's right. So I think it makes it very clear that this is indeed Pratt's field sketchbook. Because of the small size of this one, I think Pratt must have kept this for his own personal, artistic use. It's a real find.

Eduardo: Did he ever do anything with his artwork?

Gray: He did, Eduardo. Let me show you.

Eduardo: What Gray shows me next is something Jeremy will want to see. Jeremy, this little sketchbook has taken me on a very fascinating journey. When you first read to me, the name H. C. Pratt didn't ring any bells. But I discovered that was Henry Cheever Pratt, who was the official draftsman and landscape artist who was part of the Bartlett exploration. And the evidence seems fairly conclusive that sketchbook belonged to Pratt.

Jeremy: That's spectacular.

Eduardo: Your sketchbook was part of a historic journey. I tell Jeremy that the book traveled with Bartlett and Pratt's expedition, when the Southwest was foreign to most easterners. And it looks like your sketchbook became even more important after the survey was over.

Gray: This is a large print of Pratt's most famous painting painted in 1855. And you can see the direct correlation between the Saguaros and the little sketchbook. I think it's fair to say that this painting really became an iconic image of the Southwest.

Eduardo: Gray tells me that Pratt's paintings were prominently featured in successful gallery shows in Boston and New York, and seen by the leaders of society who would play a role in the growth of the west.

Gray: This painting was probably one of the most influential images in opening those areas to exploration.

Eduardo: So this little sketchbook played a part in literally drawing the shape of our country. But also in many ways influencing the future of our country.



Eduardo: Some parts of the new territory, such as California, would be settled immediately, spurred by the discovery of gold and the promise of fortune. Other areas, like parts of my home state of Arizona, took longer, and still resemble the images of untouched wilderness that Pratt captured in his sketchbook more than 150 years ago.

Jeremy: I think that the fact that it was a personal sketchbook and was carried along with the expedition makes it really special for me. Until it was identified...it would have just been a sketchbook. Now it's *the* sketchbook.

Eduardo: The debate over slavery in the new territory continued. In 1853, President Pierce sent U.S. Ambassador James Gadsden to purchase the land that Bartlett had handed over to Mexico when he mistakenly drew the border too far to the north. The Gadsden Purchase was the last major land acquisition in the contiguous United States, and established the current U.S. border with Mexico. The heated arguments over whether this new territory would be slave-holding or free helped push the nation one step closer to the outbreak of Civil War.