



*New York State Archives*

**New York State Department of Environmental Conservation  
Bureau of Real Property Field Books of Verplanck Colvin for  
the Adirondack Survey B1406**

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## Overview of the Records

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<b>Repository:</b>	New York State Archives
<b>Summary:</b>	This series consists of field books created by Verplanck Colvin during his survey of the Adirondack region. The volumes are made up predominantly of survey notes and sketches. Many also contain additional notes, topographical sketches, and letters. Indexes, legends, and conversion tables are also frequently found. Series includes a distinct subset known as the "T" volumes that consist of surveys conducted using a theodolite survey instrument.
<b>Creator:</b>	New York (State). Department of Environmental Conservation. Bureau of Real Property
<b>Title:</b>	Field books of Verplanck Colvin for the Adirondack Survey
<b>Quantity:</b>	17.88 cubic feet
<b>Quantity:</b>	442 volumes; 44 microfilm rolls 35mm; 41.4 gigabytes; 445 digital files
<b>Inclusive Date:</b>	1872-1900
<b>Series:</b>	B1406
<b>Sponsor:</b>	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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## Arrangement

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Numerical by volume number.

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## Administrative History

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Verplanck Colvin (1847-1920) was a prominent surveyor and promoter of the Adirondack Park. He began surveying the Adirondacks in 1865. In 1870, he spoke to the New York State Regents about surveying and preserving the Adirondacks. In 1872, the Regents appointed him the Supervisor of the State Survey and established the Commission of State Parks to

investigate setting up the Adirondack Park. By 1880 Colvin had completed the most thorough survey of the Adirondacks ever accomplished. He continued to work as the State Surveyor for twenty-eight years. During the time he was carrying out his survey work, he gave speeches and campaigned for the establishment of the Adirondack Park. In 1900, after thirty-five years of advocating his cause, Colvin inexplicably abandoned the crusade. He died in 1920 in a hospital for the mentally ill.

These field books were created from 1872 to 1900 as the result of Chapter 733 of the Laws of 1872 which appropriated money "to aid in completing a survey of the Adirondack wilderness of New York." Chapter 848 of the Laws of 1872 appointed commissioners for two years to survey "the timber regions lying within counties [of the Adirondack region]", with an eye to converting them into a public park. The Superintendent of the State Land Survey was authorized to make any surveys which the State Comptroller and the State Forestry Commission deemed necessary to settle the boundaries of lands having disputed titles.

Subsequent appropriations were passed to continue the survey. As the Superintendent of the Adirondack Survey, and later as the Superintendent of the State Land Survey, Verplanck Colvin conducted the survey with his assistants during the 1870s and 1890s. Geographic localities surveyed include Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Herkimer, Oneida counties; Totten and Crossfield Purchase and MaComb's Purchase; and Vrooman's Patent, along with the myriad of natural and built-environment features located on the land.

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## Scope and Content Note

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The majority of information found in the 442 volumes consists of survey notes and sketches. Other types of information include solar observations, triangulation observations, and observations of zenith distances, measurements and computations. Some or all of the following information can be found in each field book: surveyors name; name of assistant(s); name and/or lot number of the locality or landmark; and date the survey was conducted, completed, and/or filed. Many of the field books contain additional notes, topographical sketches, and letters tipped-in or inserted between the pages. Indexes, legends, and conversion tables are often found either in the front or back of the volumes, sometimes bound or tipped in. A few of the volumes contain journal-type entries which focus primarily on the survey work, but also include descriptions of locations, weather, and other daily activities. A distinct subset of volumes known as the "T" volumes (nos. 417 to 442) consist of surveys conducted using a theodolite, which is a survey instrument used for the measurement of horizontal and vertical angles.

The field books are arranged by volume number and are grouped roughly chronologically and by geographic location. The bulk of the field books are bound in leather with summary/title information printed and/or written on the cover. At the time of reformatting onto microfilm, volumes were renumbered consecutively for ease reference. Three volumes were found to be missing or were never transferred and volume 132 has only a cover extant.

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## Related Information

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### Related Material

B1405Series B1405, Verplanck Colvin Maps of the Adirondack Wilderness.

### Related Publications

These field books are cited in the publication: Colvin in the Adirondacks: a chronology and index / Francis B. Rosevear. Utica, New York : North Country Books, 1992.

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## Other Finding Aids

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### Available at Repository

Microfilm roll list is available at the repository. List gives roll number, volume number, date, names of surveyors, and brief description of survey areas.

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## Use of Records

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### Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of the material.

### Alternate Formats AvailableAlternate Formats Available

This series has been microfilmed on 44 rolls and is available for use at the New York State Archives or through inter-library loan.

Microfilm 44 rolls: 35 mm.

[Field books of Verplanck Colvin for the Adirondack Survey, 1872-1900](#)

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## Administrative Information

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### Acquisition Information

Original field books consisting of 17 cubic feet were transferred by the Department of Environmental Conservation and accessioned 08/23/2018 as accretion B1406-18.

Digital copies of the field books were transferred 08/15/2018 by the Department of Environmental Conservation. Digital copies consist of digital images of the 442 original field books and three 1956 transcript copies of volume 265. Also included is digital copy of an undated typescript index of the volumes prepared by Francis B. Rosevear, primary author of Colvin in the Adirondacks: A Chronology and Index (1992).

### Processing Information

The original field books in this series were borrowed from the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and microfilmed by State Archives staff in 1995 as part of a cooperative reformatting project, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Upon completion of microfilming, the original field books were returned to DEC and the microfilm (44 rolls) was accessioned 9/24/1996 as accretion B1406-96. Following transfer of the original field books, and digital copies thereof, to the State Archives in 2018, all formats were designated accretion B1406-18.

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## Access Terms

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- Oneida County (N.Y.)
- Hamilton County (N.Y.)
- Surveying--Public lands
- Surveying public land
- New York (State)
- Parks--New York (State)
- Franklin County (N.Y.)
- Site maps
- Mountains--New York (State)
- Adirondack Mountains (N.Y.)
- Essex County (N.Y.)
- Microforms

- **Conservationists**
- Adirondack Forest Preserve (N.Y.)
- Adirondack Park (N.Y.)
- Field notes
- Protecting environment
- Herkimer County (N.Y.)