

**Piers Island “Sons of Freedom” Doukhobor Imprisonment Collection
– MsC 147**

Simon Fraser University Special Collections and Rare Books

Anousheh Shabani
July 2014

Fonds description

Title

Piers Island "Sons of Freedom" Doukhobor Imprisonment collection

Creator

Cooper, Herbert Walters

Date(s) of creation

1932-1934

Extent

1.7 cm of textual records

30 photographs

Biographical sketch

Herbert Walters Cooper was born on September 17, 1885 in Birkenhead, England. He was attested into the 21st Battalion in Kingston, Ontario on November 3, 1914 and was given the rank of Lieutenant. On February 11, 1915, he was promoted to rank of Captain. In 1919, he was discharged on general demobilization. H. W. Cooper was employed in the Penitentiary system after the war. At the time of the imprisonment of the Sons of Freedom at Piers Island Penitentiary, he was Warden of B.C. Penitentiary.

Custodial history

The records were saved from destruction in the basement of a North Vancouver home once occupied by H. W. Cooper and were then purchased by Simon Fraser University Library, Special Collections and Rare Books.

Scope and content

The collection offers insight into the imprisonment of the "Sons of Freedom" between 1932 and 1934 at Piers Island Penitentiary. The "Sons of Freedom" Doukhobors began as a small, radical movement to reinvigorate the faith, restore traditional Doukhobor values, and protest the sale of land, education, citizenship and registration of vital statistics. They would achieve infamy through civil disobedience, nude marches, and burnings. In 1932, over 600 Sons of Freedom protestors were convicted of public nudity. As B.C. Penitentiary was unable to handle such a rise in inmate population, a satellite prison under the authority of B.C. Penitentiary was constructed on Piers Island to house these prisoners. The records document how the prison was set up and run and the problems that the federal prison system encountered regarding both staff and prisoners. The correspondence and telegrams shed light on the internal discussions of senior officials concerning the management of the prison and its prisoners. The collection consists of correspondence, memoranda, telegrams, and other textual records pertaining to the Piers Island Penitentiary created or accumulated by H. W. Cooper during his career as the warden of B.C. Penitentiaries. The collection also contains photographs which were all taken at Piers Island. The textual records predominantly consist of letters to and from H. W. Cooper regarding the penitentiary, staff, and prisoners. The records have been arranged into the following two series: Correspondence and other documents (1932-1934); and Photographs ([between 1932 and 1934]).

Note(s)

Title based on contents of the collection.

Immediate source of acquisition

The collection was purchased by Simon Fraser University Library, Special Collections and Rare Books in 2012.

Arrangement

Arrangement of the records into series was provided by the archivist.

Restrictions on access, use, reproduction, and publication

No restrictions placed on access.

Accruals

Further accruals are not expected.

Related groups of records external to the unit being described

Additional records pertaining to Piers Island Penitentiary and H. W. Cooper may be found in the Doukhobor collection (MsC 52) held in this institution.

Series descriptions

Series 1: Correspondence and other documents

Date(s) of creation

May 1932 - Jul. 1934

Extent

1.7 cm of textual records

Scope and content

Series documents the imprisonment of Sons of Freedom convicts at Piers Island Penitentiary between 1932 and 1934, from its initial stage in search for an island to set up the prison to determining the conditions for release of the prisoners. The records, the majority of which consist of correspondence between senior officials, shed light on the construction and management of the prison, as well as the problems that the federal prison system encountered regarding both personnel and prisoners. Series consists of textual records including correspondence, telegrams, and memoranda, most of which were written to or by H. W. Cooper. The remainder of the records were created by other authorities, prisoners, and relatives of prisoners. Series also contains a warrant written by J. Cartmel and a chronology written in shorthand by H. W. Cooper. Also included in the series is an empty manila envelope. The records in this series have been arranged into the following three files: 1932; 1933; and 1934.

Arrangement

Arrangement has been provided by the archivist.
Series is arranged chronologically.

Series 2: Photographs

Date(s) of creation

[between 1932 and 1934]

Extent

30 photographs : b&w prints and negative ; 12.5 x 17.5 cm or smaller

Scope and content

Series displays photographs taken on Piers Island showing the officers, guards, and matrons; male and female prisoners visiting through a fence that separates men's and women's compounds; female prisoners working; penitentiary buildings; penitentiary perimeter; vessel used for transferring prisoners; and a patrol boat. As there are no dates recorded for these photographs, it is not possible to determine the exact dates they were taken; however, based on the subject matter, it is assumed that dates of creation are between 1932 and 1934.

Arrangement

Arrangement has been provided by the archivist.
Photographs in this series have been assigned item numbers MsC 147.1 to .29.

Finding aids

Item level descriptions are available.

File descriptions

Series 1: Correspondence and other documents

File 1: [1932]

Date(s) of creation

May 1932 – Oct. 1932

Extent

0.8 cm of textual records

Scope and content

File consists of correspondence to and from H. W. Cooper pertaining to the construction of the penitentiary and matters regarding the personnel and prisoners; a warrant prepared by J. Cartmel pertaining to Mike Woiken, one of the prisoners; a chronology written in shorthand by H. W. Cooper regarding a search for an island to set up the penitentiary; the translation of a letter from Russian to English from an inmate to his wife; a report on the refusal of some prisoners to work; telegrams regarding the construction of the penitentiary; and an empty manila envelope belonging to B.C. Penitentiary.

Conservation

Rusty pins have been removed from some records and replaced with archival-safe plastic paper clips.

Arrangement

File has been arranged chronologically by the archivist.

Finding aids

Item level descriptions are available.

File 2: [1933]

Date(s) of creation

Feb. 1933 – Dec. 1933

Extent

0.5 cm of textual records

Scope and content

File consists of correspondence to and from H. W. Cooper regarding prison guards; conduct of convicts; matrons; absence of acting deputy warden; and the appointment of Major Poirier to Temporary Deputy Wardenship. Other correspondence includes a letter from Superintendent D. M. Ormond to Major I. A. Poirier regarding his transfer to the Deputy Wardenship of Piers Island Penitentiary; and a letter to a prisoner from his sister regarding the well-being of his children and lack of sufficient funds for their care. File also contains three memos; one telegram regarding the purchase of water tanks; as well as a list of construction costs.

Arrangement

File has been arranged chronologically.

Finding aids

Item level descriptions are available.

File 3: [1934]**Date(s) of creation**

Jan. 1934 – Jul. 1934

Extent

0.4 cm of textual records

Scope and content

File consists of correspondence to and from H. W. Cooper regarding the release of Doukhobor convicts; the sequence of events from the arrival of the “Sons of Freedom” at the penitentiary; as well as Deputy Warden R. S. Douglass, his responsibilities at Piers Island Penitentiary, and his successful performance of duties . File also contains one letter from G. Sloan, Attorney General of B.C., to Hugh Guthrie, Minister of Justice, pertaining to policies towards the “Sons of Freedom”.

Conservation

Rusty pins have been removed from some records and replaced with archival-safe plastic paper clips.

Arrangement

File has been arranged chronologically.

Finding aids

Item level descriptions are available.

Item descriptions

Series 1: Correspondence and other documents

BOX	FILE	TITLE	DATE(S)
File 1: [1932]			
1	1	Warrant of commitment upon a conviction adjudging imprisonment in the first instance [from J. Cartmel to all constables and other peace officers of the county of Kootenay and H. C. Cooper re – imprisonment of Mike Woiken]	19 May 1932
1	1	[H. W. Cooper manuscript chronology written in shorthand regarding a search for an island to set up prison]	[Jun. 1932]
1	1	[Memo by T. W. Fuller Chief Architect in Sidney] re – temporary penitentiary, B.C. [drawings of dormitories for officers and matrons] <i>Physical condition:</i> Item is foxed, wrinkled, and torn at the bottom.	27 Jun. 1932
1	1	Property of B.C Penitentiary, Pay / list Doukhobor Penitentiary Piers Island [empty manila envelope]	30 Jun. 1932
1	1	[Telegram from H. C. Fatt, Acting Superintendent in Ottawa to H. W. Cooper re – space between compounds and distance between buildings]	4 Jul. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to J. P. Wardrop in Sidney re – construction of buildings to be completed by Doukhobor prisoners]	13 Jul. 1932
1	1	[Telegram from H. W. Cooper to Acting Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa re - sewage and electric lighting system at Piers Island Penitentiary]	19 Jul. 1932
1	1	[Telegram from F. W. Ross in Victoria to T. W. Fuller, Chief Architect in Ottawa re - lack of sewage and electric lighting system at Piers Island Penitentiary]	19 Jul. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. C. Fatt, Acting Superintendent in Ottawa to H. W. Cooper] re – temporary penitentiary - Piers Island	20 Jul. 1932
1	1	[Letter and copy of telegram sent the previous night from H. C. Fatt, Acting Superintendent to H. W. Cooper] re - Piers Island [reprimand for asking Mr. Ross to withdraw from Piers Island Penitentiary]	21 Jul. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Acting Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – temporary penitentiary – Piers Island	21 Jul. 1932

1	1	British Columbia Penitentiary [letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island <i>Scope and content:</i> Item is a letter containing Cooper's explanation regarding the fact that he did not request Mr. Ross to withdraw from Piers Island; also regarding the placing of steps in the women's dormitories.	28 Jul. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Acting Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – temporary penitentiary, Piers Island [number of guards and identification of Doukhobor prisoners]	29 Jul. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Acting Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re - temporary penitentiary, Piers Island <i>Scope and content:</i> Item is a letter regarding temporary clerk Fleming; the wharf being in a state of preparedness to accommodate large vessels; bunk accommodation for Doukhobor prisoners; installation of pump for well; and prisoner reception identification program.	4 Aug. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – temporary penitentiary, Piers Island <i>Scope and content:</i> Item is a letter concerning the arrival of the keeper, clerk, and six guards in Piers Island on Aug. 8; the appointment of Goss as active deputy warden; personnel; first transfer of prisoners to Piers Island; field kitchens; fingerprinting the Doukhobors; and hiring an interpreter.	6 Aug. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – temporary penitentiary, Piers Island [transfer of first group male Doukhobors; interpreter; proclamation; water and sewage]	9 Aug. 1932
1	1	[Copy of telegram re – Coleman Ready Lite Lanterns]	10 Aug. [1932]
1	1	Piers Island division, special report [from L. Goss Active Deputy Warden to H. W. Cooper re – refusal of twenty-three prisoners to work]	7 Sep. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island division, “Sons of Freedom” inmates. <i>Physical condition:</i> Item is wrinkled and foxed. It also has red marks on first page and is dog-eared on third and fourth pages.	22 Sep. 1932
1	1	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island staff	5 Oct. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – blankets and bedsteads, Piers Island	12 Oct. 1932
1	1	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island, water and fire protection <i>Physical condition:</i> Item is foxed.	13 Oct. 1932

1	1	Department of Public Works, Canada, District Engineer's Office [letter from W. A. Gourlay, Senior Assistant Engineer to H. W. Cooper re – hose lines]	17 Oct. 1932
---	---	---	--------------

File 2: [1933]

1	2	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – fire protection, Piers Island, sea-water tank	17 Feb. 1933
1	2	[Telegram from Canadian Fairbanks Morse Company to the Purchasing Agent in Department of Justice in Ottawa re – tank]	11 Mar. 1933
1	2	British Columbia Penitentiary [letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, eligible list 31-533, Charles Edward Straker, no. 12	25 Mar. 1933
1	2	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, conduct of convicts	3 Apr. 1933
1	2	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island penitentiary, conduct of convicts <i>Scope and content:</i> Item is a letter regarding the construction of a wooden fence between two compounds; fire-fighting equipment; conditional correspondence and visits for prisoners.	3 Apr. 1933
1	2	[Secret letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, eligible list for guards	5 Apr. 1933
1	2	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, eligible list 31,533, prison guard 39 c-70.1, Charles Henry Gould	5 Apr. 1933
1	2	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, conduct of convicts	11 Apr. 1933
1	2	[Letter from H. C. Fatt, Inspector to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, eligible list 31,533, prison guard 39 c-70.1 Charles Henry Gould	12 Apr. 1933
1	2	Piers Island construction approximate cost of improvements	9 Jun. 1933
1	2	[Letter form D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – 793, Slorah [regarding an enquiry from Seattle concerning this convict]	1 Aug. 1933
1	2	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, temporary ticket-of-leave licenses for convicts while ill	11 Sep. 1933
1	2	Memorandum [H. W. Cooper re – Doukhobors, two matrons at Duncan Hospital]	28 Sep. 1933

1	2	[Copy of letter addressed to convict Alex Sherstobetoff from his sister Molly Osachoff re – convict's children]	17 Oct. 1933
1	2	[Letter from W. H. Craig, Inspector to H. W. Cooper] re – transfer of convicts, Piers Island to New Westminster	2 Nov. 1933
1	2	Memorandum [H. W. Cooper] re – absence from Piers Island Penitentiary of Acting Deputy Warden, while in charge of the penitentiary	8 Nov. 1933
1	2	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, absence from prison, Acting Deputy Warden	8 Nov. 1933
1	2	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, PF-470, Molly Shlahoff [requesting a full report regarding her potential release]	2 Dec. 1933
1	2	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to Major I. A. Poirier] re – Temporary Deputy Wardenship, Piers Island Penitentiary	4 Dec. 1933
1	2	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island Penitentiary Temporary Deputy Wardenship, Piers Island Penitentiary Major I. A. Poirier	4 Dec. 1933
1	2	[Letter from W. H. Craig, Inspector to H. W. Cooper] re- 4166, Wilhelmson [convict's transfer to the Royal Columbian Hospital]	5 Dec. 1933
1	2	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, female convict Shlahoff, Molly, #PF-470, male convict Shlahoff, Alex, #P-209	12 Dec. 1933

File 3: [1934]

1	3	[Letter from H. W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re - Piers Island Penitentiary [release of Doukhobor convicts] <i>Physical condition:</i> Item has foxing.	11 Jan. 1934
1	3	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, conditional release of Doukhobor convicts	13 Jan. 1934
1	3	[Letter from G. Sloan to Hugh Guthrie Minister of Justice] re – Doukhobors [policy towards Sons of Freedom]	2 Feb. 1934
1	3	[Letter from D. M. Ormond to H. W. Cooper] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, Doukhobors	22 Feb. 1934
1	3	[Letter from H.W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island Penitentiary, Doukhobors [release suggestions]	28 Feb. 1934

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|------------------------|
| 1 | 3 | [Confidential letter from H.W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re - Piers Island Penitentiary, release of convicts. | 23 Mar. 1934 |
| 1 | 3 | [Confidential letter from H.W. Cooper to Colonel J. H. McMullin, Commissioner of B.C. Provincial Police in Victoria re – release of prisoners] | 23 Mar. 1934 |
| 1 | 3 | [From H.W. Cooper to Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re – Piers Island Penitentiary [sequence of events from the arrival of Sons of Freedom at penitentiary] | [Aug. 1932 – May 1934] |
| 1 | 3 | [Confidential letter from H.W. Cooper to Major General D. M. Ormond, Superintendent of Penitentiaries in Ottawa] re - Deputy Warden Douglass, R.S. [explaining his outstanding performance]
<i>Physical condition:</i> Item has foxing on first page. | 11 Jul. 1934 |

Series 2: Photographs

BOX	FILE	ITEM NO.	TITLE	DATE(S)
1	4	MsC 147.1	[Thirty officers and guards and seven matrons in front of building at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 12.5 x 17 cm <i>Availability of other formats:</i> Also available as a negative.	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.1	[Thirty officers and guards and seven matrons in front of building at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w negative ; 12 x 17.5 cm <i>Availability of other formats:</i> Also available as a print.	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.2	[Twenty-six male staff and five matrons in front of gate at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 11.5 x 16 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.3	[Twenty-six male staff and five matrons in front of gate at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 11.5 x 16 cm <i>Scope and content:</i> This photo is the same as MsC 147.2, but in a different pose and darker lighting. <i>Physical condition:</i> Paper fiber is adhered to the surface of photograph.	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.4	[Canadian Pacific Railway "Princess Mary" at Piers Island wharf with people on board] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.5	["Narsapur" patrol boat near Piers Island with one male visible standing on left side of boat] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.6	[Dock at Piers Island] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.7	[Gate to Piers Island compound showing fence] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.8	[Gate and fence with two men at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.9	[Fence and yard looking towards Piers Island wharf] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]

1	4	MsC 147.10	[Buildings in Piers Island compound with tree stumps in foreground] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.11	[Queue of prisoners entering a building in Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.12	[Yard and fence at Piers Island Penitentiary with one male visible on the right] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.13	[Building and orchard with Piers Island compound fence visible on the right] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.14	[Fence and buildings at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	4	MsC 147.15	[Trees, fence, and buildings at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.16	[Four buildings and fence at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.17	[Building, fence, and cleared perimeter at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.18	[Piers Island Penitentiary buildings, one male facing photographer, one male in background] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 7 x 11.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.19	["Narsapur" patrol boat at Piers Island] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 12.5 x 17.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.20	["Narsapur" patrol boat near pier at Piers Island] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 12.5 x 17.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.21	["Narsapur" patrol boat close-up with guard on deck at Piers Island] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 12.5 x 17.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.22	["Narsapur" patrol boat off-shore in river with Piers Island buildings in background] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 12.5 x 17.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.23	[Group of eight Doukhobor prisoners gathered around a "Piers Island Penitentiary" life preserver] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 11x 17 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]

1	5	MsC 147.24	[Warden H.W. Cooper standing next to matron, three Doukhobor female prisoners, and one male in suit standing on pier at Piers Island] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 12 x 16.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.25	[Double-exposed photograph of group of Doukhobor female prisoners and one matron at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 11.5 x 16.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.26	[Group of approximately fifty male and female prisoners visiting through fence including two guards visible at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 11.5 x 16 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.27	[Male and female prisoners visiting through fence, with one guard visible on each side of fence at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 11.5 x 16 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.28	[Group of fifteen female prisoners filling mattresses and pillows with straw, one matron, one male carrying a mattress in background at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 11.5 x 16.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]
1	5	MsC 147.29	[Large group of female prisoners with two matrons at Piers Island Penitentiary] <i>Extent:</i> 1 photograph : b&w ; 11.5 x 16.5 cm	[between 1932 and 1934]