Guide to the William Findlay Shunk Papers

MS 449

compiled by Staff of Manuscripts and Archives

January 1964

New Haven, Connecticut
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Paging Instructions

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Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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New Haven, CT 06520
Web: http://web.library.yale.edu/mssa
Email: mssa.assist@yale.edu
Phone: (203) 432-1735
Fax: (203) 432-7441

CALL NUMBER: MS 449

CREATOR: Shunk, William Findlay, 1830-1907.

TITLE: William Findlay Shunk papers

DATES: 1828-1903

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.5 linear foot (1 box)

LANGUAGE(S): The materials are in English.

SUMMARY: Correspondence, journal, speeches and miscellanea of William F. Shunk and his family. Shunk exchanged letters with family members in Pennsylvania while sailing around the world, circa 1846-1849. The sloop, Preble, stopped in many ports, including Cape Verdes, Rio de Janiero, Hawaii, Hong Kong, and Canton, China. Speeches of his father, Francis Rawn Shunk, governor of Pennsylvania, are also included.

FINDING AID LINK: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, use the following address: http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0449.

Administrative Information

Provenance

Biographical History

Civil engineer; graduate of Dickinson College; midshipman, U.S.N. 1846-1850; in Pennsylvania Railroad service, 1851-1856; assistant engineer, Lewisburg and Spruce Creek Railroad, 1856-1857; clerk in State Department, Washington, 1861-1865; Rock Island U.S. Govt. surveys, 1865-1866; assistant engineer, Dutchess and Columbia Railroad, 1867; chief engineer, Connecticut Western Railroad, 1868-1874; chief engineer in New York City, Pennsylvania, Ecuador, 1876-1902.

Description of the Papers

The collection comprises 426 items, including family correspondence, drawings, poems, and speeches from the period 1828 to 1903. Of primary interest is the material pertaining to William Findlay Shunk's years as a midshipman of the U.S. Sloop of War Preble and its Pacific cruises during the period 1846-1850.

When sixteen years of age, William Findlay Shunk, 1830-1907, a younger son of Francis Rawn Shunk (1788-1848), governor of Pennsylvania (1845-1848), decided to go to sea. His influential father successfully petitioned the Secretary of the Navy, George Bancroft, to give him a Midshipman's warrant. Young Shunk was assigned to the Sloop of War Preble, which outfitted at Brooklyn's Navy Yards and sailed September 25, 1846, for Macao via the Cape Verdes, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Horn, Callao (Peru), Monterey, San Francisco, Hawaii, Hong Kong, and Canton to return in time via Hawaii, Benicia (California), Ursenal, and Panama. His letters home give wonderful vignettes of sea life through the eyes of an intelligent and sensitive youth. Many interesting items are recounted in these letters, such as his descriptions of life in the city of Lima, the California campaign against Mexico, and Hawaiian experiences.

One of the friends whom William F. Shunk made aboard the ship was F. L. (Frederick Lewis) Hanks, whose twenty-eight-page personal journal of the voyage of the Preble to Nagasaki in 1849, kept expressly for Shunk, is included in this collection. It recounts in detail how the captain of the vessel demanded from the Daimyo and obtained the release of certain American whalers who had been unlawfully imprisoned by the Japanese. Little known and all but forgotten today, this voyage into the forbidden waters of Japan by one unescorted sloop was a most significant precursor of Commodore Matthew G. Perry, who employed a squadron to formally open the country to the Western world nearly five years later.

An interesting addition to these narratives of sea life are the sketches Shunk made of the places the Preble visited. Several of them are of Hawaii, which made a lasting impression upon him.

In later life, as a structural engineer, Shunk wrote two authoritative books on railroad bridges, curves, and grades.

Also in this collection are some 243 interfamilial letters between Shunk's parents, Governor and Mrs. Francis Rawn Shunk, himself, and various brothers, sisters and cousins dating from 1828 through 1903, but written principally between 1846 and 1866. Together with these are thirty-six early poems by Shunk, sixty-three odd pages of speeches composed by Gov. Shunk for delivery before the Pennsylvania Assemblies, and some other miscellaneous items. The family letters are mainly from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, except that the majority of brother Caspar's are from Cornwall Furnace, Pennsylvania.

Arrangement
Collection was inventoried as received from the donor.
## Collection Contents

### Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Letters from William F. Shunk to his parents from Brooklyn, New York (thirteen items)</td>
<td>1846 Aug 15-1846 Sep 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>These were the first to be written by him from aboard the Preble, while waiting to set sail from New York.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Recounting the voyage of the Preble from Brooklyn to Callao and Lima, Peru</td>
<td>1847 Feb 26-1847 Apr 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recounting the voyage from Lima to San Francisco, Monterey, Panama, Mazatlan, and again to Callao and back to Monterey</td>
<td>1847 Apr 18-1848 Jun 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recounting the voyage from San Blas to Hawaii and on to Boca Tigris, Whampoa, and Shanghai and return to Honolulu</td>
<td>1848 Jun 21-1849 Nov 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Letters from William F. Shunk to his mother recounting the long stay aboard the Preble at Benicia, California, after his return from China and Hawaii</td>
<td>1850 Feb 22-May 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Journal, kept for William F. Shunk by his old shipmate F. L. (Frederick Lewis) Hanks, of a cruise in the Preble from Hong Kong to Okinawa, and then to Nagasaki, Japan</td>
<td>1849</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Naval Commissions and letters signed by George Bancroft, Gov. Shunk, and two other secretaries of the Navy concerning William F. Shunk's appointment aboard the U.S. Sloop of War Preble</td>
<td>1846-1850</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Poems by William F. Shunk, written in long hand</td>
<td>After 1843</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>Letters from Jane Shunk to her son William F. Shunk (eighty-two letters)</td>
<td>1845-1867</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>Letters from Lilly Shunk (Brown) to her brother William F. Shunk (twenty-four letters)</td>
<td>1842-1893</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>Letters from Caspar Shunk to his younger brother William F. Shunk (sixty-one letters)</td>
<td>1846-1858</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>Letters from Jane Shunk to her daughter Gertrude (forty-six letters)</td>
<td>1852-1867</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Miscellaneous letters, invitations, and other materials from friends and family of Shunk</td>
<td>1828-1903</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>Speeches and other materials, written in long hand, prepared by Governor Francis Rawn Shunk of Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1845-1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Pen and pencil sketches by William F. Shunk (forty-seven items)</td>
<td>Circa 1846-1850</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Many of the sketches include hand-written annotations and some correspondence.</td>
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