

JOHN R. HAMILTON PAPERS

Mss. 5066

Inventory

Compiled by
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Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
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Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

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SUMMARY

Size.	0.6 linear ft.
Geographic locations.	Louisiana
Inclusive dates.	1863-1865
Language.	English
Summary.	U.S. Naval records documenting Civil War operations of the USS <i>Commodore</i> as it patrolled the navigable waterways of Louisiana in order to prevent the South from trading with other countries. Records consist of reports, correspondence, orders, and lists of seamen and Naval officers. Papers also contain some records of the USS <i>Vincennes</i> .
Arrangement.	Papers are organized in chronological order.
Restrictions on access.	If microfilm is available, photocopies must be made from microfilm.
Copyright.	Physical rights and copyright are retained by the LSU Libraries.
Citation.	John R. Hamilton Papers, Mss. 5066, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
Stack locations.	X:34, OS:H

HISTORICAL NOTE

The USS *Commodore*, a side-wheel steamer, was built at New Orleans, Louisiana, and fitted for service with the United States Navy, West Gulf Blockading Squadron in 1863. The ship's captain, Acting Master John R. Hamilton, a Pennsylvania native, was ordered to patrol the Mississippi Sound, Lake Pontchartrain, the Blind and Tickfaw rivers, and other waterways along the Gulf Coast near New Orleans. The patrols through these navigable waterways were to prevent the South from smuggling and trading with other nations. The small steamer remained in that area throughout the war. The ship was renamed the USS *Fort Gaines* on Sept. 1, 1864 while under Hamilton's command. It was sold at New Orleans in August of 1865.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The John R. Hamilton papers consist of official reports, correspondence, military orders, and rosters of crewmembers. A large part of the collection consists of handwritten reports on the naval operations of the USS *Commodore*/USS *Gaines*. John R. Hamilton relates to his superiors the details of his pursuit and seizure of illegal trading ships, as well as his encounters with Confederate soldiers, legal trading ships, deserters from both the North and the South, civilians, and runaway slaves.

U.S. ships also served as naval escorts to authorized trading ships on the Amite, Blind, Tickfaw, Tangipahoa, and Pascagoula Rivers, as they picked up and transported goods to New Orleans. Escorts were necessary to protect planters and others who had taken the oath of loyalty to the Union, making it possible to trade legally with New Orleans. Occasionally the *Commodore* would surprise small bands of Confederate soldiers. In January 1864, the *Commodore* escorted the steamer *Kate Dale* up the Tchefuncte River to transport lumber across Lake Pontchartrain to New Orleans. This part of Louisiana, known as the Northshore, was still under Confederate control. To ensure the safety of the *Kate Dale*, Hamilton sent a party of sharpshooters from the 12th Maine, who reported seeing twelve to fifteen guerrillas in the area. While guarding a sawmill in the vicinity, Hamilton's men picked up a number of refugees, including women and children, from Mobile, as well as seven slaves (Jan. 10, 1864). In another report, Hamilton states Confederates had taken a man prisoner, burned houses, and shot a man by the name of Watkins, who had taken a loyalty oath to the U.S. (Nov. 21, 1864).

The Hamilton papers also describe the destruction of factories, mills and other sources of Confederate military supplies, as in the case of a tannery at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Owned by a Frenchman named Pierre Sirvant, it was burned by Hamilton of the USS *Commodore* and Francis H. Grove of the USS *Corypheus* (Oct. 19, 1863). Hamilton also reports that everything was destroyed at a sawmill near Pearlinton. In the same report, he describes the pursuit of a schooner on Wolf River. He tells of the captain abandoning the schooner, and the civilians left behind (Dec. 4, 1863). Additionally documented is the attempt by the Confederate Cavalry to burn the schooner *May Flower* (ca. 1865).

Not all of the actions were against Confederates. One report, for example, gives details of the capture of a deserter from the U.S. 2nd Louisiana Regiment Infantry, John McCaul, who with three others had been committing robberies in St. Tammany Parish (July 1865). Another report refers to the transport of Confederate deserters to New Orleans (undated). In addition, Special Orders, No. 82 provides free transportation and substance to deserters of the Confederate Army who take a loyalty oath to United States. The order also offers the opportunity to serve in the Union Army (Aug. 28, 1864).

Additionally, records include detailed lists of former slaves serving under Hamilton's command (ca. Aug. 1864); seamen who were discharged in New Orleans (Dec. 1, 1864); a muster roll of officers serving on the *Commodore* (July 14, 1864); a requisition list of supplies (July 1, 1865); and a list of supplies received by the USS *Gaines* (July 15, 1865).

There is also a payroll list for the ship's crew (undated). Also found in the collection is a circular distributed by *Bureau of Ordinance*, Navy Dept., which recorded the number of shots fired from the ship (April 1, 1865), as well as a furlough for Hamilton (July 10, 1865) and a request for an escort (June 3, 1865) signed by Rear Admiral Henry Knox Thatcher.

Other items of interest include printed letters and general orders intended to be read on the deck of all vessels in the West Gulf Blockading Squadron and related to Navy personnel. In General Order No. 11, Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles offers his congratulations on the capture of Mobile, Ala. (April 29, 1865). Two letters from Rear Admiral David G. Farragut reveal the severity of naval discipline during the war. One discusses the court martial of Dennis J. Maguire of the USS *Richmond*, who was sentenced to one year's hard labor for leaving his post (Sept. 13, 1864). The other relates to the judgment against William H. Miller for insubordination and use of disrespectful language (Sept. 15, 1864).

In addition, papers contain some records of the USS *Vincennes*, an 18-gun sloop-of-war stationed at Ship Island. Its purpose was to prevent recapture of the island by Confederates and to guard the pass out of Mississippi Sound. Records of the *Vincennes* include a roster of crewmembers (Jan. 1, 1863), the seizure of Confederate provisions and medical supplies (Jan. 10, 1863), and charges against crewmembers for sleeping on duty (May 26, June 8, 1863). Also found in the collection is a "Descriptive list of men" serving on a ship. This roster of crewmembers includes African Americans. The name of the ship and the year of the document have been lost due to its poor condition (1861-1863).

INDEX TERMS

African American sailors--Louisiana.

Commodore (Steamer)

Farragut, David Glasgow, 1801-1870.

Fort Gaines (Steamer).

Fugitive slaves--Louisiana.

Hamilton, John R.

Kate Dale (Steamer)

Louisiana--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Military deserters.

Naval discipline--United States.

Soldiers--Confederate States of America.

United States. Navy--Officers.

United States--History --Civil War, 1861-1865--Naval operations--Participation,
African American.

Vincennes (Sloop-of-war)

Welles, Gideon, 1802-1878.

CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack</u> <u>Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folders</u>	<u>Contents with dates</u>
X:34	1	1-35	Papers, 1863-1864.
	2	1-58	Papers, 1865.
OS:H		1	“Descriptive List of men...”, 1861-1863.