Title: William A. Leidesdorff collection
Date (inclusive): 1834-1857, 1928
Collection Identifier: MS 1277
Extent: 1.5 boxes (0.75 linear feet)
Contributing Institution: California Historical Society
678 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA, 94105-4014
(415) 357-1848
reference@calhist.org
URL: http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/
Location of Materials: Collection is stored onsite.
Language of Materials: Most collection materials are in English, with some documents in Spanish. Some Spanish documents are accompanied by English translations.
Abstract: The collection consists of Leidesdorff's correspondence (1845-1847) as vice-consul; correspondence, account books, orders, and receipts (1834-1848) reflecting Leidesdorff's activities as a merchant in Yerba Buena (later San Francisco), including accounts with the crew of the Schooner Julia Ann and Hawaiian and Indian sailors; papers relating to Leidesdorff's land grant, Rio de los Americanos, and the legal battle between Joseph L. Folsom and Anna Maria Spark, Leidesdorff's mother, regarding the inheritance of Leidesdorff's estate; and papers of Henry W. Halleck from his law practice with Halleck, Peachy, and Billings, consisting of Halleck's drafts for clients' land grant claims and other legal documents, some dealing with Leidesdorff's grant.
Access
The collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
All requests to reproduce, publish, quote from or otherwise use collection materials must be submitted in writing to the Director of Library and Archives, North Baker Research Library, California Historical Society, 678 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94105. Consent is given on behalf of the California Historical Society as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission from the copyright owner. Such permission must be obtained from the copyright owner. Restrictions also apply to digital representations of the original materials. Use of digital files is restricted to research and educational purposes.
Existence and Location of Copies
Photocopies of collection materials are filed with the collection, in folders following the documents they duplicate.
Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], William A. Leidesdorff collection, MS 1277, California Historical Society.
Acquisition Information
The collection consists of several different gifts of papers related to William A. Leidesdorff, donated to the California Historical Society at different times by Henry R. Wagner, Mr. and Mrs. K. K. Bechtel, and Mrs. George Dunlap Lyman in memory of George Dunlap Lyman.
Biographical Information
William Alexander Leidesdorff was born in 1810 in the Danish West Indies. His father, Alexander Leidesdorff, was a Dane, and his mother, Anna Maria Spark, was a creole of mixed-race ancestry. After conducting trade in New Orleans, Leidesdorff came to California in 1841 as master of the schooner Julia Ann, making frequent trips between San Francisco (then Yerba Buena) and Honolulu to sell hides and tallow. In 1843, he purchased a lot in Yerba Buena at the corner of Clay and Kearny streets, building a large warehouse on the waterfront in 1844 and the City Hotel in 1846. Naturalized as a Mexican citizen in 1844, Leidesdorff obtained a 35,000-acre land grant on the American River known as Rancho Rio de los Americanos. A prominent merchant and landowner, Leidesdorff also served in a number of civic positions, including United States vice-consul to Mexico (appointed by Thomas Larkin in 1845) and treasurer of San Francisco.
Leidesdorff died of typhus in 1848, leaving behind a vast estate without a wife or children to claim it. Legal entanglements and litigation ensued: the public administrator of the estate, William Davis Merry Howard, was removed in 1849; and Captain Joseph Libby Folsom traveled to St. Croix to locate Leidesdorff's heirs (his mother Anna Maria Spark and her children) and purchase the title of the estate from them. After Spark discovered the enormous value of her son's property, she refused to accept further payment from Folsom and contested the contract. Represented by Halleck, Peachy & Billings,
Folsom eventually won the suit; he died in 1855, leaving the Leidesdorff-Folsom estate to be administered by his attorneys.

**Scope and Contents**

The collection consists of photostatic copies of Leidesdorff's correspondence (1845-1847) as vice-consul; original correspondence, account books, orders, and receipts (1834-1848) reflecting Leidesdorff's activities as a merchant in Yerba Buena (later San Francisco), including accounts with the crew of the Schooner *Julia Ann* and Hawaiian and Indian sailors; papers relating to Leidesdorff's land grant, Río de los Americanos, and the legal battle between Joseph L. Folsom and Anna Maria Spark, Leidesdorff's mother, regarding the inheritance of Leidesdorff's estate; and papers of Henry W. Halleck from his law practice with Halleck, Peachy, and Billings, consisting of Halleck's drafts for clients' land grant claims and other legal documents, some dealing with Leidesdorff's grant.

Leidesdorff's business correspondence and records document his transactions with many prominent early Californians, including Yerba Buena alcaldes Francisco Guerrero and George Hyde; Thomas Larkin; William Davis Merry Howard; Samuel Brannan; Stephen Smith; Nathan Spear; Henry Dalton; Concepcion Avila; and Henry Mellus. Leidesdorff's accounts with the crew of the *Julia Ann* (1843) and with Indian and Canaca, or Hawaiian, sailors (1847) record the sailors' names, dates shipped, wages advanced and earned, and goods used. Land grant papers include Leidesdorff's petition, in Spanish, for Rancho Río de los Americanos in Sacramento County (1844); Henry W. Halleck’s translation of the petition; and two maps of the land grant.

The collection also includes papers related to the Leidesdorff estate, especially concerning the dispute between Joseph L. Folsom and Anna Maria Spark; and legal papers of Henry W. Halleck, mostly consisting of copies of petitions for land grants and related documents in Halleck’s hand. Some of Halleck’s papers concern the Leidesdorff estate, including Mexican attorney Mariano Galvez’s opinion on the Folsom dispute, in Spanish (1853), and Halleck defense of the Board of Land Commissioners (also 1853). Grantees represented in Halleck’s papers include: José Dario Argüello (Rancho Las Pulgas, San Mateo County); Jacob Leese (Rancho Huichicha, Napa County); Jaspar O’Farrell (Rancho Estero Americano, Sonoma County); Joseph P. Thompson (Rancho Napa, Napa County); Francisco Solano (Rancho Suisun, Sonoma County); Cayetano Juarez (Rancho de Tulucay, Napa County); Francisco Branch (Rancho Arroyo Grande, San Luis Obispo County); the heirs of Francisco Guerrero Palomares (Rancho Corral de Tierra, San Francisco County); Juan Bautista R. Cooper or John B.R. Cooper (Rancho La Sagrada Familia or Bolsa del Potrero, Monterey County); Thomas Hardy (Rancho Jesu Maria, Yolo County); and Zeferino Carlon (Rancho Arroyo Grande, Santa Barbara County). Halleck’s papers also contain copies of deeds, articles of agreement, denouncements, and other legal documents pertaining to lawsuits in which the firm Halleck, Peachy & Billings was involved.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog:

- Julia Ann (Schooner).
- Halleck, Peachy & Billings (Firm)--Records and correspondence.
- Spark, Anna Maria--Trials, litigation, etc.
- Folsom, Joseph L. (Joseph Libby), 1817-1855--Trials, litigation, etc.
- African Americans--California.
- Businessmen--California.
- Commerce--California.
- Land grants--California.
- Rancho Rio de los Americanos (Calif.)
- Sailors--California--San Francisco.
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