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## **Finding aid to the William A. Leidesdorff collection, MS 1277**

California Historical Society  
678 Mission Street  
San Francisco, CA, 94105-4014  
(415) 357-1848  
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**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

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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, 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.

#### **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 Río 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,

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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 Huichica, 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 Jesus-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:

Leidesdorff, William A. (William Alexander), 1810-1848.

Leidesdorff, William A. (William Alexander), 1810-1848--Estate.

Julia Ann (Schooner).

Halleck, H. W. (Henry Wager), 1815-1872.

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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Box 1, Folder 1

#### Correspondence 1845-1847

##### Scope and Contents

Photostatic copies of Leidesdorff's correspondence in his role as vice-consul.

Box 1, Folders 2, 4

#### Business correspondence 1845-1848

Box 1, Folder 3

#### William D.M. Howard indenture to Frederick Billings 1849 June 10

Box 1, Folders 5-6

#### Accounts for the Schooner *Julia Ann* 1843

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Box 1, Folders 7-9	<b>Accounts for Canaca and Indian sailors 1847</b>
Box 1, Folders 10-12	<b>Miscellaneous accounts and other business records 1847-1848</b>
Box 1, Folders 13-14	<b>Río de los Americanos land grant records 1844, undated</b>
Box 1, Folders 15-16	<b>City of San Francisco 1847-1852</b>
Box 1, Folders 17-18	<b>Records in the dispute between Joseph L. Folsom and Anna Maria Spark over Leidesdorff's estate 1851-1857</b>
Box 1, Folder 19	<b>Opinions and newspaper articles on the dispute between Joseph L. Folsom and Anna Maria Spark over Leidesdorff's estate circa 1852-1854, undated</b>
Box 1, Folders 20-21	<b>Robert Cowan, "Liedesdorff-Folsom estate: A forgotten chapter in the romantic history of early San Francisco" [manuscript] 1928</b>
Box 1, Folder 22	<b>Henry W. Halleck papers concerning the Leidesdorff estate 1853</b>
Box 1, Folders 22-24,	<b>Henry W. Halleck land case papers 1841-1857</b>
Box 2, Folders 1-2	<b>Henry W. Halleck notes on preemption laws undated</b>
Box 2, Folders 3-4	<b>Joint Committee of California Senate and Assembly reports, and M.G. Vallejo letter [copies] 1852</b>
Box 2, Folders 5-6	