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## **A guide to the Captain Charles Scammon records, 1865-1946**

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2014

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## A Guide to the Captain Charles Scammon records

### HDC0340

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, National Park Service

2014, National Park Service

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**Title:** Captain Charles Scammon records

**Date:** 1865-1946

**Identifier/Call Number:** HDC0340 (SAFR 17257)

**Creator:** Unknown

**Physical Description:** 2 items.

**Repository:** San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Historic Documents Department

Building E, Fort Mason

San Francisco, CA 94123

**Abstract:** Captain Charles Scammon records (SAFR 17257, HDC 340) contain Scammon's private journal (a typescript and a carbon copy) written between 1865 and 1866 while leading an expedition to Alaska and Siberia on behalf of the Treasury Department and Western Union Telegraph Company. The expedition's mission was to conduct soundings in the Bering Sea to ascertain the possibility of laying a telegraph cable across the Bering Sea to reach Europe (in lieu of a trans-Atlantic cable). The flag ship on this expedition was the barkentine GOLDEN GATE. In addition, there are two folders of various records including correspondence, typed and handwritten. The collection is available for research use without restriction.

**Physical Location:** San Francisco Maritime NHP, Historic Documents Department

**Language(s):** In English.

#### Access

This collection is open for use unless otherwise noted.

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#### Processing Note

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Please cite the title and collection number in any correspondence with our staff.

#### Preferred Citation

[Item description], [Location within collection organization identified by Collection Number/Series Number/File Unit Number/Item Number], HDC0340 (SAFR 17257), Captain Charles Scammon records, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

#### Acquisition Information

SAFR-00001

This collection was transferred from Golden Gate National Recreation Area to San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.

#### Historical or Biographical Note

In 1861, Captain Scammon abandoned whaling to become a lieutenant in the U.S. Revenue Service, now the Coast Guard. He became a captain in 1865 when he was assigned the command of a fleet of eight ships. Although sailing under the U.S. Revenue Service flag, this fleet was actually part of the Western Union Telegraph Expedition, under the general command of Colonel Charles S. Bulkely, Engineer in Chief for the Western Union Company.

This telegraph expedition is an interesting but forgotten episode of history. At the time of its departure, a successful Atlantic cable was yet to be laid and the project seemed impossible. Many people had come to believe, however, that it would be more practical to lay a cable across Canada, beneath the Bering Strait and thence across Siberia, and that was

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the purpose of this expedition, to find a route for such a cable. A land party under the command of Colonel Bulkely conducted the survey across British Columbia.

The maritime division of this expedition under Captain Scammon made soundings in the Bering Sea and established a base on the Siberian coast. The flotilla sailed from San Francisco and consisted of the Bark GOLDEN GATE, as the flagship, the barks PALMETTO, ONWARD, CLARA BELL, H.S. RUTGERS, the steamer GEORGE S. WRIGHT and the Schooner MILTON BADGER.

This expedition probably had some influence on the purchase of Alaska in 1867. However, the successful completion of the Atlantic cable in July 1866, eliminated the need for a trans-Siberian route.

(adapted from a biography contained in the collection)

#### **Collection Scope and Content**

Captain Charles Scammon records (SAFR 17257, HDC 340) contain Scammon's private journal (a typescript and a carbon copy) written between 1865 and 1866 while leading an expedition to Alaska and Siberia on behalf of the Treasury Department and Western Union Telegraph Company. The expedition's mission was to conduct soundings in the Bering Sea to ascertain the possibility of laying a telegraph cable across the Bering Sea to reach Europe (in lieu of a trans-Atlantic cable). The flag ship on this expedition was the barkentine GOLDEN GATE. In addition, there are two folders of various records including correspondence, typed and handwritten. The collection is available for research use without restriction.

#### **Collection Arrangement**

This collection is arranged into four folders: two for the journal and two for the other materials.

#### **Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Scammon, Charles Melville, 1825-1911

Western Union Telegraph Company

United States Coast Guard

Bering Sea

Siberia

Official reports

Correspondence

Logbook

Journals (accounts)

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