George Fearing Hollis Papers

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Descriptive Summary

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Physical Description: 0.4 Linear feet (1 archives box)
Date (inclusive): 1852 - 1903
Abstract: Papers of George Fearing Hollis, Union Naval officer (1861-1865) and United States Consul to Cape Town, South Africa (1888-1893). The papers consist mainly of correspondence Hollis wrote to his mother and wife during the Civil War.

Creator: Hollis, George Fearing, b. 1838

Acquisition Information
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Scope and Content of Collection
Papers of George Fearing Hollis, Union Naval officer (1861-1865) and United States Consul to Cape Town, South Africa (1888-1893). The papers consist mainly of correspondence Hollis wrote to his mother and wife during the Civil War, describing both personal and war-related activities aboard three different vessels engaged in blockading activities on the eastern seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico; appointments, promotions, and official acts; and memoirs written after the Civil War documenting his role in various naval battles, expeditions, and rescue missions. The collection also contains correspondence regarding his tenure (1888-1893) as the United States Consul in Cape Town, focusing largely on the aftermath of the 1892 murders of a ship captain and his wife aboard the ship William Hales. These files (1892-1895) document accusations made against Hollis regarding safekeeping of valuables, and his efforts to clear his name. Also included are miscellaneous official records, memos, and correspondence (both official and personal); songs and poems relating to the Boer struggle; and an undated handwritten draft regarding mining in Mexico.

The papers are arranged in three series: 1) MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS, 2) CIVIL WAR MATERIALS, and 3) CAPE TOWN CONSULSHIP MATERIALS.

Biography
George Fearing Hollis was born on February 16, 1838, in Cohasset, Massachusetts, the fourth son of Hannah Sweet (nee Pratt) (the granddaughter of Thomas Fracker, a Boston shipbuilder who reportedly participated in the Boston Tea Party) and William Owen Hollis, a whipmaker. Hollis served in the United States Navy during the Civil War (1861-1865), returning briefly to Massachusetts to marry Eliza A. (also known as Lizzie) Simmons of Augusta, Maine, in August of 1863. Their children were William Stanley, Lucy G. and George S. Lizzie died in 1870, possibly as the result of childbirth complications. Hollis then married Louise M. (nee unknown). The 1870-1880 censuses record Hollis living in Arlington, Massachusetts as a tin ware manufacturer, but his activities from 1865 through 1887 are not documented in the collection.

In 1888, Hollis was appointed United States Consul to Cape Town, now South Africa, a post he held until 1893 when his resignation was requested due to alleged mishandling of valuables belonging to a murdered ship captain and his wife. Although eventually vindicated, he did not return to consular service. His first son, known as W. Stanley Hollis, took over the Cape Town consul agent position on his father's recommendation to the State Department, and had a long diplomatic career serving at Port Natal, Lourenco Marques (now Maputo, Mozambique), Pretoria, Beirut, and Lisbon. W. Stanley is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Civil War Period:
On July 24, 1861, Hollis became an acting master's mate in the United States Navy on a 295-ton commercial steamship re-fashioned into a gunboat, the USS Louisiana. The ship began blockading operations off the North Carolina coast and on expeditions up enemy-held rivers. Hollis participated in the capture of Roanoke Island and New Bern and the capture of several Confederate schooners. In August, 1862 he was promoted to ensign.

Hollis was then transferred to the USS Octorara, a 981-ton side-wheel gunboat built at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The Octorara participated in blockading activities in the Western Gulf, as well as the southern Atlantic region. After the capture of the English sloop Brave, filled with sacks of salt, Hollis was tasked to take the ship to Key West for adjudication. Hollis participated in the Battle of Mobile Bay (Alabama), bombardment of both Fort Powell and Fort Morgan, and in the eventual capture of Fort Morgan. In April of 1865, the Octorara helped capture the city of Mobile.

In June, 1864, Hollis was promoted to acting master and reassigned to the bark USS Fernandina blockading the waters of Ossabaw Sound near St. Simon's and St. Catherine's islands off the Georgia coast near Savannah. Here, Hollis would help to rescue some two hundred former slaves hiding in a rice swamp and establish one of the first freedman's colonies on St. Catherine's Island. Hollis was among the first to make contact with General Tecumseh Sherman's advancing army as they neared the city of Savannah and relayed this intelligence to the fleet commanders. He would later try, unsuccessfully, to document that he was the very first to deliver the news of Sherman's arrival. Hollis was officially detached from the Navy on April 18, 1865.

Cape Town Consulship Period:
In August of 1888, Hollis became the United States Consul at Cape Town, in what was then the Orange Free State (Oranje Vrystaat in Afrikaans.) In the 1850s the independent Boer Republics (Transvaal and the Orange Free State) were created but discovery of diamonds in 1870 and gold in 1886 caused a much-resented influx of "uitlanders," (Afrikaans for "foreigner," Europeans, mainly British, immigrants) and foreign investment. Thus, Hollis became consul during a period of great tension, midway in the twenty-year period between the first Boer War (1880-1881) and the second Boer War (1899-1902). Hollis appeared to be sympathetic to the Boer position and was well regarded during his consulship. Part of Hollis' job was to protect American citizens and their property and it was false allegations about his performance of these duties that led the State Department to request his resignation as consul in 1893.

In 1892, Captain Buckley and his wife were murdered on board the ship William Hales during its voyage to Cape Town. When the ship arrived, Hollis removed jewelry from the bodies and had other valuables double-sealed in a trunk. The trunk was left on the ship under the care of the first mate whom Hollis regarded as competent. Hollis then enlisted the local chief of police to join him onboard for an inquiry into the murders. Later, Hollis was accused of negligence, and possible complicity, when most of the Buckley's valuables were stolen from the trunk by the first mate. The new captain, Welcom Gilkey, accused Hollis to his employers and Captain Buckley's son wrote to the State Department demanding action. Although the State Department sent Hollis notice of the accusations, before he had time to respond, they requested his resignation. He complied but also gathered affidavits to prove that he was not negligent and that Gilkey, his accuser, was incompetent, untruthful, and an alcoholic. Hollis was fully vindicated and the Buckley's son wrote the State Department and apologized when the facts showed the accusations against Hollis were unsupported.

Hollis returned to Massachusetts after this affair but his activities afterwards are not documented in this collection.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Hollis, George Fearing, b. 1838 -- Archives
Sherman, William T. (William Tecumseh), 1820-1891
Cape Town (South Africa) -- History -- 19th century -- Sources
Roanoke Island (N.C.) -- History -- Capture, 1862
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Sources

MISCELLANEOUS

Box 1, Folder 1  The American Eagle (Vol. 1, No. 2) 1852 September 29

General note
Printed newspaper published in Chelsea, Massachusetts and designed to emulate Chamber's Miscellany, a popular nineteenth century trivia periodical. Signed "Hollis and Haskell."

The American Eagle (Vol. 1, No. 2), 1852 September 29
MISCELLANEOUS

Box 1, Folder 2
Society of the Burnside Expedition and of the Ninth Army Corps certificate of membership, 1871 May 11

Society of the Burnside Expedition and of the Ninth Army Corps certificate of membership, 1871 May 11

Genealogy of Thomas Hollis circa 1900

Genealogy of Thomas Hollis, circa 1900

Box 1, Folder 4
Letter from E. Hollis, 1903

General note
The letter is possibly by George Hollis's brother Eben, or sister Ellen. The writer states that he or she is going on a Smithsonian expedition to Santa Maria, a volcano in Guatemala which erupted in 1902.

Box 1, Folder 5
Letter from Louise M. Hollis to George F. Hollis, 1879 July 3

General note
Letter from Hollis's second wife, Louise, b. 1841. She describes daily activities and the travails of being a "left-behind wife."

Box 1, Folder 6
Letter by William Stanley Hollis to John T. Granger, 1903 February 9

General note
Letter from George Hollis' son to a lawyer in New York discussing his heritage, stating that his great-great-grandfather, Thomas Fracker, was a reported member of the Boston Tea Party.

Box 1, Folder 7
Geology in Mexican history, circa 1900

General note
Handwritten draft of an essay discussing the geology of Mexico and its silver and gold mining industries, with references to biblical and modern theories regarding geological deposits.

CIVIL WAR
Scope and Content of Series

A) Correspondence: Letters from and to Hollis during his Civil War service (1861-1865). The majority of the correspondence is with Hollis' mother, Hannah, and his girlfriend, and then first wife, Lizzie. Also included is correspondence with brothers Everet Stanley and William H.; Napoleon Collins, a former commander of the USS Octorora; and other superiors, friends and acquaintances. Of note is a letter from his hometown friend and 1st Massachusetts Infantry private, John W. Day, which includes a piece of paper allegedly dotted with the blood of Col. Ephraim Elmer Ellsworth. Arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

B) Navy Documents (1861-1865): Official Navy documents regarding Hollis' promotions from acting master's mate, to ensign, to acting master, as well as correspondence as Hollis sought to correct a mistake in his records after his detachment in 1865. Included is a memorandum by Hollis and correspondence (1865) regarding court martial proceedings Hollis brought against Acting Ensign Charles Sawyer III, who served under Hollis on the USS Fernandina.

C) Memoirs: Two undated, handwritten essays, "The Battle of Roanoke Island" and "How I Opened Communication with Sherman's Army and Became a Southern Planter."

Correspondence

George Fearing Hollis Papers MSS 0471
Letter from Napoleon Collins to George F. Hollis, 1869 March 22
Letter from Napoleon Collins to George F. Hollis, 1869 March 22

Letter from John W. Day to George F. Hollis, 1861 July 5
General note
Letter includes an enclosed piece of paper reported by Day, Hollis’ hometown friend and private in the 1st Massachusetts Infantry, to be dotted with the blood of the first officer to be killed in the Civil War, Col. Ephraim Elmer Ellsworth. Ellsworth was the 24-year-old personal friend of Abraham Lincoln who studied law in Lincoln’s Illinois office and worked on Lincoln’s political campaign. On May 24, 1861, the day after Virginia officially seceded, Col. Ellsworth became the first Union officer to die in the Civil War when he was shot by innkeeper James W. Jackson after Ellsworth cut down the large Confederate flag flying above Jackson’s inn. His death was a “cause celebrae” when Lincoln had his friend’s body lay in repose in the White House.

Letter from John W. Day to George F. Hollis, 1861 July 5

Letter from Lizzie Hart to George F. Hollis, 1867
General note
Three letters.

Letters from Lizzie Hart to George F. Hollis, 1867

Letter from Everet Stanley Hollis to his brother, George F. Hollis, 1863 December 16
Letter from Everet Stanley Hollis to his brother, George F. Hollis, 1863 December 16

Letters from George F. Hollis to his mother, Hannah Sweet 1861 - 1864
Letters from George F. Hollis to his mother, Hannah Sweet, 1861 - 1864

Letters from Eliza “Lizzie” Hollis to George F. Hollis 1861 - 1864
General note
Writer is Eliza A. (aka Lizzie) Hollis (nee Simmons), George Hollis’s first wife.

Letters from Eliza “Lizzie” Hollis to George F. Hollis, 1861 - 1864

Letters from George F. Hollis to his brother, William H. Hollis 1861 - 1862
Letters from George F. Hollis to his brother, William H. Hollis, 1861 - 1862

Letter from Alexander Murray, lieutenant and commander of the USS Louisiana, to George F. Hollis, 1862 April 28
Letter from Alexander Murray, lieutenant and commander of the USS Louisiana, to George F. Hollis, 1862 April 28

Unidentified letter written in partial code 1861 September 20
Unidentified letter written in partial code, 1861 September 20

Navy Documents

Official correspondence between George F. Hollis and the US Navy 1861 - 1865
General note
Promotions and discharge paperwork. Includes a letter from George Hollis to the Navy regarding an error in Hollis’ official discharge papers that he sought to correct.

Official correspondence between George F. Hollis and the US Navy, 1861 - 1865

Court Martial of Acting Ensign Charles Sawyer III 1865
General note
Contains a handwritten copy of charges brought by Hollis, as commander of the USS Fernandina, against Sawyer for neglect of duty and language unbecoming of an officer and subversive of good discipline.
**Memoirs**

**Battle for Roanoke Island between 1862 and 1903**

*General note*

Handwritten account of difficulties of finding vessels to navigate shallow North Carolina rivers to participate in the battle (1862 February 7-8) where Brigadier General Ambrose E. Burnside landed an amphibious force and took the Confederate fort. Also includes an account of a storm encountered as the convoy sailed to the battle site.

**Battle for Roanoke Island, between 1862 and 1903**

*How I Opened Communication with Sherman's Army and Became a Southern Planter between 1865 and 1903*

*General note*

Handwritten account in two sections. Part one describes Hollis aboard the USS *Fernandina* in Ossabaw Sound, awaiting the arrival of General William T. Sherman's army to Savannah, Georgia as well as a description of the Union capture of Fort McAllister. There is also correspondence (1861, 1891) regarding Hollis' unsuccessful attempt to prove that his communication was, in fact, the first to inform the fleet that Sherman had made it to the coast. Part two gives an account of rescuing over two hundred African-American men, women and children from a rice swamp and helping to establish a freedman's colony on St. Catherine's Island, as well as a recounting of Hollis' scouting expedition to the mainland where he distributed directions to signal the fleet from Kilkenny Bluff if and when Sherman's troops should arrive.
Captain Buckley Affair

Box 1, Folder 22
Affidavit by A. Clark, Cape Town Inspector of Police 1893 March 13
Affidavit by A. Clark, Cape Town Inspector of Police, 1893 March 13

Box 1, Folder 23
Copies of letters regarding Welcome Gilkey's role in the Buckley affair 1892 November 16
Copies of letters regarding Welcome Gilkey's role in the Buckley affair, 1892 November 16

Box 1, Folder 24
Transcriptions of newspaper articles that appeared in the Cape Times regarding George Fearing Hollis' accomplishments and departure 1893 April 13
Transcriptions of newspaper articles that appeared in the Cape Times regarding George Fearing Hollis' accomplishments and departure, 1893 April 13

Box 1, Folder 25
Inventories of the valuables of Captain and Mrs. Buckley 1892 November 22
Inventories of the valuables of Captain and Mrs. Buckley, 1892 November 22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 26</th>
<th>Letter from Melville Buckley to the US Department of State, 1895 December 17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General note</td>
<td>Copy of original letter, with a newspaper clipping pasted on. Buckley retracts his prior accusations against Hollis' conduct.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 27</th>
<th>Affidavit by physician William C. Schultz, 1893 March 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General note</td>
<td>Affidavit states that on November 11, 1892, Schultz found Captain Gilkey to be unconscious and suffering from acute alcoholism, not poison as Gilkey later claimed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 28</th>
<th>Letter from Smith &amp; Co. acknowledging news of the murder of Captain Buckley and his wife at sea from Captain Hollis, 1892 October 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General note</td>
<td>The letter appoints Captain Welcom Gilkey, the bearer of the letter, to be in command and asks Hollis to assist him.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 29</th>
<th>US Department of State correspondence regarding the Buckley affair, 1893 - 1895</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General note</td>
<td>Handwritten and typescript correspondence including a copy of the accusation of Hollis' alleged mishandling of the Buckley's valuables written by their son, Melville Buckley.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Box 1, Folder 30 | Letter from United States Consular agent William Van Ness in Johannesburg expressing thanks to Hollis for his work and regret at his departure, 1893 July 1 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 31</th>
<th>Letters by A. F. Bosman, 1892 - 1893</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General note</td>
<td>Two letters. Handwritten correspondence in Afrikaans from a &quot;landdrost&quot; (local magistrate similar to a mayor or provincial governor) in Krugersdorf, the mining city founded in 1887 by Marthinus Pretorius and named after Paul Kruger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 32</th>
<th>Letter from L. de Villiers to George F. Hollis, 1900 August 15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General note</td>
<td>De Villiers was a friend from South Africa whose husband was a Bank of Africa employee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 33</th>
<th>Letters from Hannah Sweet to her son, George F. Hollis, 1888 - 1889</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General note</td>
<td>Writer is George Hollis's mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box, Folder</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td><strong>Letter to the editor of the Cape Times by George F. Hollis 1890 July 5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The letter is a response to an anonymous communication in the Cape Times expressing outrage that blacks were allowed to attend Fourth of July celebrations at the consulate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td><strong>Notice from the German Consulate announcing the death of King Frederic, Emperor of Germany 1888 June 16</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td><strong>Certificate of Appreciation from the Transvaal government thanking George Hollis for his assistance in regard to a treaty with Italy 1889 December 14</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td><strong>Boer poems and songs circa 1888-1893</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handwritten copies of songs and poems popular in the period between the two Boer Wars, including a poem entitled, &quot;To Oom Paul,&quot; a term of affection (&quot;Uncle Paul&quot; in Afrikaans) for South African statesman Paul Kruger, a translation of the &quot;Transvaal National Hymn,&quot; and &quot;God Save John Bull.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td><strong>Receipts, notes and correspondence 1891</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>