
A guide to the George S. Payne 1835-1840 journals onboard Niantic (built 1835; ship, 3m), 1835-1840

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A Guide to the George S. Payne 1835-1840 journals onboard Niantic (built 1835; ship, 3m)

HDC1656

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2013, National Park Service

Title: George S. Payne 1835-1840 journals onboard Niantic (built 1835; ship, 3m)

Date: 1835-1840

Identifier/Call Number: HDC1656 (SAFR 23812)

Creator: Payne, George S.

Physical Description: 4 items. Online items available.

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

Building E, Fort Mason

San Francisco, CA 94123

Abstract: The George S. Payne 1835-1840 journals onboard NIAN TIC (built 1835; ship, 3m), (SAFR 23812, HDC 1656) consists of four handwritten journals containing the observations and musings of able seaman and second mate George S. Payne while sailing on four year-long voyages from New York City to China and back. The digitally scanned pages of the journals are available for use.

Physical Location: San Francisco Maritime NHP, Historic Documents Department

Language(s): In English.

Access

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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], HDC1656 (SAFR 23812), George S. Payne 1835-1840 journals onboard Niantic (built 1835; ship, 3m), San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

Acquisition Information

SAFR-02207

Journals were received as a gift.

Historical or Biographical Note

The NIAN TIC (built 1835; ship, 3m) is one of the most famous storeships of the Gold Rush Fleet and has periodically returned to public attention long after fire consumed the ship down to the waterline in 1851. Rediscoveries of the buried wreck, in 1872, 1907, and again in 1978, have ensured that the ship continues to be remembered as one of the first of the ships that were hauled ashore and converted to "other uses" in the frenzied growth of the San Francisco waterfront in 1849 and 1850.

Mr. Thomas Childs, of Chatham, Connecticut built the NIAN TIC for the New York mercantile company N.L. & G. in 1835. She was one hundred nineteen feet long and displaced approximately ninety tons. Described as having a square stern, round neck, two decks and a simple billet head, she was a typical full-bodied cargo carrier with a twenty nine foot beam and a

twenty foot depth of hold with a nearly flat bottom. She was built for capacity, not for speed, and used that capacity in her lifetime in the China Trade, as a whaler in the South Pacific and finally on land as a warehouse, the substructure of a hotel and ultimately as part of the foundation of the Trans-America Pyramid in the heart of the financial district of San Francisco. NIAN TIC's first incarnation was as a ship engaged in the China Trade, making four trips to the ports of Canton, Linton, Whampoa and Hong Kong in China and Manila in the Philippines, returning to New York after approximately twelve months. Packed with tea, porcelain, silks and other commodities, she was a major factor in the financial success of her owners as each of the four voyages between 1835 and 1840 is estimated to have made the company nearly \$400,000 profit on each trip.

One of the most lucrative aspects of the China Trade was the illicit, but extremely profitable trade in opium. A trade in which British and American firms transported the drug from India to China. It was a controversial source of conflict between China and foreign traders, especially the British, who in response to the Chinese closure of the port and destruction of a massive cache of the narcotic, invaded and occupied Hong Kong in the First Opium War. Writing in his journals, George Payne records the Chinese preparations to repel the invaders in the fall of 1840, including the beheadings of westerners involved in the trade. Fortunately for Payne and his crewmates, the Niantic made her money through the export of tea and not the importation of opium. As a result she was delayed but allowed to sail home as a relatively unmolested witness to the conflict.

George Silliman Payne, born in Cornwall Connecticut sailed onboard the first four voyages of the NIAN TIC, keeping a journal of his adventures onboard, advancing from able seaman to the rank of Second Mate over the course of his five year seafaring career. After leaving the ship in 1840, Payne served for a time in the US Army and attained the rank of Captain. Ending up in south Florida at the conclusion of the Second Seminole War, he was running a trading post in Seminole Indian territory in the summer of 1849 when he was violently murdered by a band of outlaw Indians in what came to be known as the Massacre at Payne's creek. This massacre turned out to be the opening salvo in the buildup to the Third Seminole War and Payne's gravestone is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is located on the grounds of a Florida State Park. After 1840, NIAN TIC was sold and converted to a whaler in the South Pacific. Nine years later, after coming to San Francisco in the Gold Rush, NIAN TIC was dragged across the mudflats of Yerba Buena Cove to become one of the most famous and important warehouses in the booming city of San Francisco. In that same year of 1849 across the continent in the everglade swamps of Florida, George S. Payne's death started a chain of events which resulted in the Third Seminole War and the virtual destruction of the native population of Florida. These journals provide a unique glimpse into the young lives of both George S. Payne and the ship NIAN TIC.

Collection Scope and Content

The George S. Payne 1835-1840 journals onboard NIAN TIC (built 1835; ship, 3m), (SAFR 23812, HDC 1656) consists of four handwritten journals containing the observations and musings of able seaman and second mate George S. Payne while sailing on four year-long voyages from New York City to China and back. The digitally scanned pages of the journals are available for use.

Built in 1835 for the mercantile company N.L & G. of Chatham Connecticut, NIAN TIC was put to sea in New York City for the first time in October of that year. Engaged in the China Trade, she made four trips in the second half of the 1830's to the ports of Canton, Whampoa, and Hong Kong in China and Manila in the Philippines, returning to New York after each year-long voyage.

The journals written by the young George Payne, show his growth from a naive eighteen year old kid with no sailing experience to five years later, a confident sailor clambering up the masts in a gale to reef sails and repair lines. The journals also describe in intense detail the adventures of Payne and his shipmates on NIAN TIC, including the murder of the Captain's steward by the ship's cook, the dress and religion of the Chinese, the threat of Malaysian pirates, the beauty and terror of an erupting volcano in the Philippines, a devastating outbreak of malaria on the ship, and the tensions between the Chinese and the British Empire surrounding the beginning of the First Opium War in 1840. Payne makes a diary entry about twice a week through the four voyages, noting the weather and the ship's position by latitude and longitude, enabling the reader to feel the voyages as if onboard.

Collection Arrangement

Four journals and nine compact discs housed in a 15.5" by 10.5" oversize box.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Sailing ships

Payne, George S.

Niantic (built 1835; ship, 3m)

South Sea Islands

China, Southwest
Diaries
Journals (accounts)
Sailors
Sailing

File Unit 1. **Journal of a voyage from New York towards Canton, Ship Niantic, 1835 Oct 31-1836 Oct 2**

Extent: 1 volume (86 pages).

Physical Description: Bound unruled paper with ink and pencil.

File Unit 2. **Journal of a voyage from New York towards Canton, Ship Niantic, 1836 Nov 6-1837 Oct 14**

Extent: 1 volume (84 pages).

Physical Description: Bound unruled paper with ink and pencil.

File Unit 3. **Journal of a voyage from New York towards Canton, Ship Niantic, 1838 Sep 10-1839 Sep 25**

Extent: 1 volume (138 pages).

Physical Description: Bound unruled paper with ink and pencil.

Scope and Content Note

T. Griswold, Master

File Unit 4. **Journal of a voyage from New York towards China, Ship Niantic, 1839 Nov 13-1840 Dec 10**

Extent: 1 volume (212 pages).

Physical Description: Bound unruled paper with ink and pencil.

Scope and Content Note

L.F. Doty, Master. The main journal entries end on page 147 (image 149)

Additional Entries

Several blank pages and crude drawings of vessels and ports.

Additional entries at page 195 beginning with "to become..." with 2 leaves torn diagonally across page with missing sections. These pages were found separated from the binding and may have been moved from the body of the journal. They left in their current position since there was evidence of their being in the position in the journal for some time. Note the imprint of the writing on the facing page from the reaction to the acidic ink.

An entry titled: "Canton Collection of Customs Foreign Ships Port Clearance" followed by 2 pages of Chinese writing.