Collection Summary
Title: Henry Willis Wells Papers
Inclusive Dates: 1851-2012
Bulk Dates: 1851-1865
ID No.: MSS86487
Creator: Wells, Henry Willis, 1841-1864
Extent: 700 items
Extent: 2 containers
Extent: 0.8 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2022086487
Summary: Civil War naval officer and merchant marine sailor. Correspondence, journals, transcriptions, and miscellany relating to Wells's experiences at sea in the 1850s and 1860s.

Acquisition Information
The papers of Henry Willis Wells were given to the Library of Congress by Thomas G. Wells in 2022.

Processing History
The papers of Henry Willis Wells were arranged and described by Katherine Madison in 2022.

Other Repositories
Additional material related to the Wells family was donated to the Massachusetts Historical Society by Thomas G. Wells.

Copyright Status
The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Henry Willis Wells is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions
The papers of Henry Willis Wells are open to research. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting.

Published Edition

Preferred Citation
Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Henry Willis Wells Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Biographical Note

Henry Willis Wells was born on July 4, 1841, in Massachusetts. Wells began his sailing career at the age of fifteen, circling Cape Horn in the ship Ocean Telegraph (clipper). During the Civil War, he sailed with the United States Navy from 1861 to 1864, serving on multiple ships including the Cambridge (armed steamer), the Ceres (armed steamer), and the Gem of the Sea (bark). For the majority of the war, Wells was stationed along the Chesapeake Bay and into North Carolina. Aboard the Cambridge, he witnessed the Battle of Hampton Roads (also known as the Battle of the Monitor and Merrimack or the Battle of the Ironclads) in March 1862. In November 1862, Confederate forces took Wells prisoner and sent him to Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia; he was released as part of a prisoner exchange that December. Wells died on December 31, 1864, when his ship, the Annie (schooner), was lost at sea off the coast of South Carolina.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Henry Willis Wells (1841-1864) span the years 1851 to 2012, with the bulk of the material dating from 1851 to 1865. The collection documents Wells's young adulthood as a sailor traveling from his home in Massachusetts to various American and international ports, as well as Wells's service aboard Union naval vessels in the Chesapeake Bay and Florida Keys during the United States Civil War. The bulk of the collection consists of Wells's correspondence to his mother, Elizabeth Sewall Willis Wells. Additional correspondents include his father, Thomas Goodwin Wells; two of his sisters, Eliza May Wells Greeley and Louisa Wells Wendte; and his brother, Benjamin Wells. Wells's nephew and namesake, Henry Willis Wells (1895-1978), transcribed many of his uncle's Civil War letters, and these transcriptions, in manuscript form with errors, are contained in the collection.

The collection also includes various journals kept by Wells, a copy of the order book of the steamer Cambridge (copied by Wells), various certificates and appointment letters, and a photograph of Wells set into a fragment of porcelain.

Arrangement of the Collection

This collection is arranged alphabetically by material type and topic, with correspondence arranged chronologically.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People
Greeley, Eliza May Wells, 1839-1880--Correspondence.
Wells family--Correspondence.
Wells, B. W. (Benjamin Willis), 1856-1923--Correspondence.
Wells, Elizabeth Sewall Willis, 1820-1900--Correspondence.
Wells, Henry W., 1895-1978.
Wells, Henry Willis, 1841-1864.
Wells, Thomas Goodwin, 1804-1873--Correspondence.
Wendte, Louisa Wells, 1846-1927--Correspondence.

Organizations
Cambridge (Steamer)
United States. Navy.

Subjects
Merchant marine--United States.
Seafaring life.
Voyages and travels.

Places
Chesapeake Bay (Md. and Va.)--History.
Florida Keys (Fla.)--History.
Florida--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
Maryland--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Naval operations.
Virginia--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

**Occupations**

Naval officers.
Seamen.
## Container List

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