



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

William Ronckendorff papers

1844-1896

MssCol 2617

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Summary

Creator: Ronckendorff, William, 1812-1891

Title: William Ronckendorff papers

Date: 1844-1896

Size: .21 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Purchased from the estate of Catherine Ronckendorff, 1934.

Abstract: William Ronckendorff (1812-1891) of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was an American naval officer. He joined the U.S. Navy as midshipman in 1832 (passed 1838), and was commissioned Lieutenant in 1843, Commander in June 1861, and Captain in 1866, retiring as Commodore in 1874. The William Ronckendorff papers, 1844-1896, chiefly contain naval orders and instructions documenting his service from 1859 to his retirement in 1874. Most items date from the Civil War, pertaining to his command of U.S. Ships Water Witch, San Jacinto, Ticonderoga, Powhatan, Monadnock, and Tonawanda. Ronckendorff's letter of November 21, 1862 to Gideon Welles (copy) describes his attempt to track the C.S.S. Alabama at Martinique; there are also instructions for the Monadnock on the James River at the fall of Richmond, April 1865, and a letter from Congressman Samuel J. Randall regarding Ronckendorff's promotion prospects, 1870. Other items include his commission as Lieutenant, 1844, effective 1843, and incomplete instructions to his son George R. Ronckendorff upon his death, 1890. Also found are George R. Ronckendorff's passport, 1896, and a letter to him, 1894; a few genealogical notes and clippings; and a letter from [Philip McLachlin?] of Charleston, South Carolina expressing thanks to his friend Richard Dale at Philadelphia, dated May 12, [1817?].

Preferred citation: William Ronckendorff papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Susan P. Waide, 2018.

Creator History

William Ronckendorff (1812-1891) of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was an American naval officer. He joined the U.S. Navy as midshipman in 1832 (passed 1838), and was commissioned as Lieutenant in 1843, Commander in June 1861, and Captain in 1866, retiring as Commodore in 1874. On active sea duty for much of his career, his later service included the Mexican-American War, the Paraguay Expedition of 1858-1859, and the Civil War, with detachment to the U.S. Coast Survey in 1860.

During the Civil War he commanded U.S. Ships Water Witch, San Jacinto, Ticonderoga, Powhatan and, in 1865, the Monadnock and Tonawanda, both monitors, following service on a court of inquiry in the Midwest. While under Ronckendorff's command at sea in 1862 and early 1863, the San Jacinto engaged in the bombardment of Sewell's Point, Virginia on May 15, 1862; served as flagship while attached to the East Gulf Blockading Squadron; was quarantined for yellow fever; and gave chase to the C.S.S. Alabama in the West Indies, arriving in New York for major repairs in February 1863. The San Jacinto was not present at the battle of the Monitor and the Merrimack (C.S.S. Virginia) on March 9, 1862, that day marking its departure from Boston for Hampton Roads. Ronckendorff then served as flag captain of the Ticonderoga (1863) and Powhatan (1863-1864) while attached to the West Indies Squadron. Post-war stations included New Orleans and the West Indies.

William Ronckendorff married Elizabeth Dale Pettit (1828-1887), the granddaughter of Commodore Richard Dale, in 1856. Two children survived to adulthood, Thomas Pettit (1857-1885) and George Read (1860-1897). William Ronckendorff died in New York City on November 27, 1891 and was buried at Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia.

Scope and Content Note

The William Ronckendorff papers, 1844-1896, chiefly contain naval orders and instructions documenting his service from 1859 to his retirement in 1874. Most items date from the Civil War, pertaining to his command of U.S. Ships Water Witch, San Jacinto, Ticonderoga, Powhatan, Monadnock, and Tonawanda. Ronckendorff's letter of November 21, 1862 to Gideon Welles (copy) describes his attempt to track the C.S.S. Alabama at Martinique; there are also instructions for the Monadnock on the James River at the fall of Richmond, April 1865, and a letter from Congressman Samuel J. Randall regarding Ronckendorff's promotion prospects, 1870. Other items include his commission as Lieutenant, 1844, effective 1843, and incomplete instructions to his son George R. Ronckendorff upon his death, 1890. Also found are George R. Ronckendorff's passport, 1896, and a letter to him, 1894; a few genealogical notes and clippings; and a letter from [Philip McLachlin?] of Charleston, South Carolina expressing thanks to his friend Richard Dale at Philadelphia, dated May 12, [1817?].

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Military commissions

Occupations

Naval officers.

Geographic Names

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Naval operations

Names

Dale, Richard, 1756-1826

Randall, Samuel J. (Samuel Jackson), 1828-1890

Ronckendorff, George R., 1860-1897

Ronckendorff, William, 1812-1891

United States. Navy -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

United States. Navy -- Officers