

**Guide to the Sailing Cards circa 1850  
MS0009**

**The Mariners' Museum Library  
at  
Christopher Newport University**

Contact Information:  
**The Mariners' Museum Library**  
**100 Museum Drive**  
**Newport News, VA 23606**  
**Phone: (757) 591-7782**  
**Fax: (757) 591-7310**  
**Email: [Library@MarinersMuseum.org](mailto:Library@MarinersMuseum.org)**  
**URL: [www.MarinersMuseum.org/library](http://www.MarinersMuseum.org/library)**

Processed by: Jeffreen M. Hayes, 2007

## **DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY**

**Repository:** The Mariners' Museum Library

**Title:** Sailing Cards circa 1850

**Catalog number:** MS0009

**Physical Characteristics:** 30 cards

**Language(s):** English

**Creator(s):**

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The sail card collection contains rare visual material from the mid-nineteenth century. Advertisements for travel and shipping on clipper ships, most of the cards represent vessels built in Boston, Massachusetts and New York, New York. As examples of maritime advertising, as well as graphic arts of the 1850s, the cards signify the formation of an American identity through visual representation of the vessels, vignettes depicting ships, expedition and typography. All of these elements work to understand the importance of trade and culture.

While most of the sail cards advertise voyages to San Francisco, during and after the California Gold Rush, there are announcements for foreign travel on foreign vessels to Europe and Australia. These are important in showing America's global role in history and trade.

Departure dates were seldom printed on the card due to advance knowledge of departure by word of mouth. However, there are a few cards that have a sail date—ones printed when the card was printed. Out of these items, a handwritten departure date stands out, which also contains a handwritten itinerary and the death date of the ship's captain.

Other unique sail cards include one with the signature of the lithographer and another printed possibly on vellum. A lithographer signing his work in this period was rare, although the print company's name is usually found on the work. The sail card on vellum is not only unique due to the medium but the color—turquoise.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

### **Accession number**

MS0009

### **Accession date**

2007

### **Restrictions**

Open to all researchers

### **Publication Rights**

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### **Preferred Citation**

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### **Note to Users**

Due to the fragile and rare nature of the collection, researchers are requested to handle the materials with caution and in accordance with prescribed archival practices. When using these materials, please preserve the original order of the collection.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL SKETCH**

The clipper ship era, although attributed to the nineteenth-century, approximately from 1843-1865, was preceded by the Baltimore built vessels, also called clippers, in the late eighteenth-century. Built in the late eighteenth-century, Baltimore clippers differ from the nineteenth-century clipper. They were built for the War of Independence and heavily involved in the slave trade, under Portugal and Spain.

Nineteenth-century clippers were built primarily for economic reasons: trade with China, participation in the 1849 California Gold Rush, and oceanic expedition. With the British, as the leader in sea trading, the Americans competed with them on the seas.

With this competition, Americans desired fast sailing ships, hence the birth of the clipper. At its building peak, in the 1850s, the term *clipper* was used loosely and the origin of the term is unclear. Clippers refer to fast ships, with hulls made specifically for speed, not necessarily cargo.

The decline of the clipper ship era coincided with the end of the Civil War. Although the Civil War is considered the marker, other national events coincided with the vessels decline. These include the advent of the steamer or steamship, the transcontinental railroad and the opening of the Suez Canal. As far as economically, the clipper was expensive to build. Nonetheless, the period is significant to expedition and exploration as well as oceanic/global trade, helping with the national economy. In addition, the clipper ship era is important to the formation of a national identity. Overall, the era and the sailing cards aid in understanding nineteenth-century culture, ideas, and beliefs.

### **SERIES DESCRIPTION**

This collection is organized into a single series.

### **FILE GUIDE**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>BOX 1</b>    | Sail Cards   |
| <b>Folder 1</b> | Finding Aid  |
| <b>Folder 2</b> | <i>Daniel Marcy</i> , Sutton & Co., ca.1850 [MS0009.001] |
| <b>Folder 3</b> | <i>Criterion</i> , Comstock's Line, ca.1850 [MS0009.002] |
| <b>Folder 4</b> | <i>C.S. Pennell</i> , Sutton & Co., ca.1855              |

- This ship was built in 1855 and named for Charles S. Pennell, son of Jacob Pennell, Jr. The Pennells were a family of shipbuilders. Charles S. Pennell operated a shipyard with his brothers during 1834 to 1874. [MS0009.003]
- Folder 5** *C.S. Pennell, Sutton & Co., ca.1855*
- This card is similar to MS009.003. [MS0009.004]
- Folder 6** *Sea Serpent, Sutton & Co., ca.1850*  
[MS0009.005]
- Folder 7** *War Hawk, Comstock's Line, ca.1855*  
The *War Hawk* was launched in 1855. It participated in the Cape Horn and China Trade. Bush & Comstock and others were the original owners and was sold in 1871 to S.L. Mastick & Co. in San Francisco. The vessel was then used to transport lumber. It was burned in 1883. [MS0009.006]
- Folder 8** *Atalanta, Thos. F. Wells & Co., ca.1850*  
This ship is named for the Greek goddess, Atalanta, a female athlete. She was very swift and would beat the men in running and wrestling. This particular sail card contains handwritten departure date, the death date of the captain, and itinerary on the back of the card. The captain of the vessel was Edwin G. Colby who died on March 10, 1858. [MS0009.007]
- Folder 9** *Anahuac, Glidden & Williams, ca.1850*  
Isaac N. Jackson was a captain of this ship which sailed to San Francisco, California. [MS0009.008]
- Folder 10** *W.B. Dinsmore, Merchants' Express, ca.1850*  
W.J. Drummond was the builder of this vessel which was built in Bath, Maine. [MS0009.009]
- Folder 11** *David Crockett, Sutton & Co., ca.1850*  
*David Crockett* is named after the famed frontiersman, military and politician. Crockett was elected and served in the Tennessee state legislature. After losing an election, he moved to Texas and fought in the Battle of the Alamo. The vessel was one of the longest used fleet, approximately 40 years. Its commander, John A. Burgess graduated from Brown University and was a navigator of national reputation. In 1874, Burgess was washed overboard and drowned. [MS0009.010]
- Folder 12** *Chasca, Windsor's Regular Line, ca.1850*  
[MS0009.011]
- Folder 13** *Fearless, Merchants' Express, ca.1850*  
Designed by Samuel H. Pook, *Fearless* was built by A. & G.T. Sampson of East Boston. The vessel was launched July 28, 1853. William F. Weld & Co., owners of the largest fleet in American, owned this ship. Captain George W. Homans was the commander of the ship sometime between 1853 and 1858. [MS0009.012]
- Folder 14** *Prima Donna, Merchants' Express, ca.1850*  
[MS0009.013]
- Folder 15** *Prima Donna, ca.1864*  
*Prima Donna* was involved in the trade business with China, Japan and the Philippines. It raced the vessel *Governor Morton*. *Prima Donna* was

- also active in the Civil War with the United State Navy. This sail card has a sail date of May 5, 1864, leaving from New York. [MS0009.014]
- Folder 16** *Hilda*, Baetjer & De Vertu, ca.1863  
This card has an approximate departure listed: October 1863. [MS0009.015]
- Folder 17** *David Crockett*, Sutton & Co., ca.1850  
Refer to MS0009.010 [MS0009.016].
- Folder 18** *Duquesne*, Baetjer & De Vertu, ca.1850  
[MS0009.017]
- Folder 19** *Rosina*, Baetjer & De Vertu, ca.1863  
February 1863 is listed as an approximate departure date. [MS0009.018]
- Folder 20** *Whistler*, Sutton & Co., ca.1850  
[MS0009.019]
- Folder 21** *Guardian*, Comstock's Line, ca.1850  
This ship was commanded by Captain Samuel Borland who also commanded the *Gauntlet* in 1858. [MS0009.020]
- Folder 22** *Almena*, Merchants' Express, ca.1850  
The *Almena* sail card is unique in that it is not printed on card stock but possibly vellum. It is also a greenish color. [MS0009.021]
- Folder 23** *Mary Elizabeth*, Baetjer & De Vertu, c.1863  
June 1863 is the sail date printed on the card. [MS0009.022]
- Folder 24** *Charger*, Glidden & Williams Line, ca.1865  
The *Charger* was built by E.G. Pearce in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and launched in 1856. This particular vessel did not have a figurehead, which was substituted with a billet. It sailed the Boston, San Francisco, Hong Kong, Manila, and Liverpool route. Captain Joshiah N. Knowles commanded the ship between 1862 and 1865. The ship was wrecked off the coast of Cebu. A specific sail date of "Saturday, February 4, 1865" is printed on the card. [MS0009.023]
- Folder 25** *Huguenot*, Glidden & Williams Line, ca.1850  
This card has the lithographer's name at the bottom of the image: K'LBurns. This is the only card in the collection that contains any identifying information about the lithographer or designer of the sail card. [MS0009.024]
- Folder 26** *California*, Merchants' Express, ca.1850  
The commander of the ship was Henry Barber, formerly of the *Galeta*. [MS0009.025]
- Folder 27** *Cutwater*, Merchants' Express, ca.1850  
[MS0009.026]
- Folder 28** *Intrepid*, Comstock's Line, ca.1850  
[MS0009.027]
- Folder 29** *Olga*, Baetjer & De Vertu, ca.1863  
March 1863 is the sail date printed on this card. [MS0009.028]
- Folder 30** *Istoch M*, Baetjer & De Vertu, ca.1850  
[MS0009.029]
- Folder 31** *Andora*, Baetjer & De Vertu, ca.1863

August 1863 is the departure date on this card. [MS0009.030]

**MATERIALS REMOVED**

No materials have been removed from this collection

**SOURCES CONSULTED**

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Knight, Frank. *The Clipper Ship*. London: Collins. 1973.  
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**SUBJECTS**

Advertising cards  
Clipper ships  
Sailing cards