

**Guide to the Jacob Nicklis Family Letters, 1862-1880  
MS0363**

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

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## DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

**Repository:** The Mariners' Museum Library  
**Title:** Jacob Nicklis Family Letters, 1862-1880  
**Catalog number:** MS0363  
**Physical Characteristics:** 9 items  
**Languages:** English  
**Creators:** Jacob Nicklis family; Weeks, Grenville

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The son of a German immigrant, William Nicklis, Sr., Jacob had two brothers and four sisters. Aside from those facts, little is known of Nicklis' early life. He joined the United States Navy at the age of 16. Jacob Nicklis was 21 years of age when he stepped on board the US Steam Battery *Monitor* at the Washington Navy Yard in November 1862, having reenlisted in the United States Navy a month earlier. According to Nicklis' reenlistment records, he stood 5 feet 7 ½ inches tall, had grey eyes, light hair, and a ruddy complexion. Jacob Nicklis perished with 15 fellow crewmen, when *Monitor* sank on December 31, 1862.

Nicklis' father, William Nicklis Sr., was according to newspaper accounts Buffalo's leading custom tailor. He and his eldest son, Jacob's brother, ran a shop on Main Street. The family home was at Washington and Swan streets in the city. Beyond information contained in the letters themselves, nothing is known of the other members of the Jacob Nicklis family represented in these letters: sisters Eva Nicklis and Antoinette (Nicklis) Leonard, and nephew W.C. Leonard.

Grenville M. Weeks (1837-1919), son of Dr. Cyrus Weeks and Maria Child, followed in his father's footsteps and became a surgeon. He spent many years as a surgeon among New York's American Indian tribes and eventually became secretary of the New York Indian Commission. He served on *Monitor* in 1862 and suffered debilitating injuries to his right hand and shoulder sustained during rescue operations from the doomed ironclad. He married and later divorced Helen Stuart Campbell (1839-1918), who was a noted social reformer and author.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection is comprised of six letters from Jacob Nicklis to his father William Nicklis dating from October 27<sup>th</sup> and December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1862. Through his letters, Nicklis describes the series of events that led to his service on board the USS *Monitor*. Nicklis details his first views of the ship in the Washington Navy Yard, volunteering as part of her crew, and life on board the *Monitor*. He presents, in detail, the manning and firing of *Monitor's* guns. Throughout his letters, Nicklis expresses his misgiving on serving on board *Monitor*. He states that the turret is "getting weak" and that "they say we will have a pretty rough time a going around Hatteras but I hope it will not be the case." Jacob Nicklis did not survive the sinking of *Monitor*.

In his letter to Nicklis's sister, Antoinette, Grenville Weeks, surgeon on *Monitor*, gives his condolences on the loss of her brother, Jacob. Weeks writes that Nicklis went down with *Monitor* and states that her brother "did his duty well, and has I believe gone to a brighter world, where storms do not come."

The final two letters are written to Nicklis' sister Antoinette (Nettie). The first is from Jacob and Nettie's sister Eva, and the second is from Nettie's son W. C. Leonard. Both letters date after the Civil War. Son W. C. writes of his trip to Chicago, while sister Eva complains about family financial matters.

The letters are organized into 9 folders and arranged in ascending chronological order.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

### **Accession number**

A2006.15

### **Accession date**

2006

### **Restrictions**

Open to all researchers.

### **Publication Rights**

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### **Preferred Citation**

Jacob Nicklis Family Letters, 1862-1880, MS0363, The Mariners' Museum Library

### **Acquisition Information**

The Jacob Nicklis family letters were acquired by the museum through the generosity of the Bronze Door Society at The Mariners' Museum.

### **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.

## **FILE GUIDE**

### **BOX 1**

**Folder 1** Finding Aid/Background Information

**Folder 2** Correspondence, October 1862  
October 7, 1862: Jersey City.

Four-page letter from Jacob Nicklis to his father William Nicklis, Sr. Nicklis describes trip from Buffalo to Jersey City; the receiving ship *North Carolina*; food and rations of the crew, and the issuance of passes. He states that many of his friends are aboard the receiving ship. He writes of his visit to New York City and the purchase of clothing.  
[MS363.01.02.01]

**Folder 3**

Correspondence, November 1862

November 3, 1862: Washington Naval Yard.

Eight-page letter from Jacob Nicklis to his father William Nicklis, Sr. Nicklis describes his journey to the Washington Navy Yard. Once at the Yard, Nicklis viewed the USS *Monitor*. He states that the *Monitor* lies in the Yard for repairs and that some of her crew had deserted claiming that the boat was not seaworthy. However, he feels that there will be no danger as she has been “altered” so that there “will be no danger.” Nicklis states his desire to remain with the “rest of the boys from Buffalo” when assigned to a ship. He writes that Mrs. Lincoln, General Scott, General Banks, and other prominent officers were on board the *North Carolina* the previous week. [MS363.01.03.01]

**Folder 4**

Correspondence, November 1862

November 16, 1862: U.S. Steamer *Monitor*, Off Newport News.

Four-page letter from Jacob Nicklis to his father William Nicklis, Sr. Nicklis writes that he and his friend Isaac Scott (from Buffalo) volunteered for the *Monitor*. He states that he did not wish to volunteer to serve on the *Monitor*; however, the “rest of the boys from our place did so I joined with them.” He writes that he does not like the accommodations on board *Monitor*. According to Nicklis, he has been painting the *Monitor* for the last three days. His position on board is the number one gun as “first shot man” and in the captain’s boat he is one of the oarsmen.  
[MS363.01.04.01]

**Folder 5**

Correspondence, November 1862

November 17, 1862: U.S. Steamer *Monitor*, Off Newport News.

Four-page letter from Jacob Nicklis to his father William Nicklis, Sr. Nicklis requests, through a detailed listing, that his father to send him clothing and supplies. He writes that some of the officers and men harvested oysters and asks if the draft in Buffalo, New York has ended.  
[MS363.01.05.01]

**Folder 6**

Correspondence, December 1862

December 27, 1862: U.S. Steamer *Monitor*.

Four-page letter from Jacob Nicklis to his father William Nicklis, Sr. Nicklis writes that the *Monitor* still lies off of Newport News, and that the ship is expected to leave any day. He requests that his father not send his Christmas box. According to Nicklis, he visited Newport News and Fortress Monroe, the prior week, and describes some of the troops from Buffalo, New York, encamped there. Nicklis describes, in detail, the manning and firing of *Monitor’s* guns. He also states that the turret is “getting weak” and that the *Monitor* may have to return to the Washington

- Navy Yard for repairs. [MS363.01.06.01]
- Folder 7** Correspondence, December 1862  
December 28, 1862: U.S. Steamer *Monitor*.  
Four-page letter from Jacob Nicklis to his father William Nicklis, Sr. Nicklis writes that the *Passaic* has arrived; that once the *Montauk* and *Connecticut* arrive *Monitor* will proceed to Charleston; and that the *Montauk* and *Connecticut* have reached Philadelphia and departed on Friday. Nicklis gives a detailed account of Christmas dinner on board *Monitor*. He requests that his father not respond to this letter until he hears from him again. "They say we will have a pretty rough time a going around Hatteras but I hope it will not be the case." This is the last letter from Jacob Nicklis. [MS363.01.07.01]
- Folder 8** Correspondence, January 1863  
December 28, 1862: New York.  
One-page letter from Grenville M. Weeks to Antoinette Nicklis. Weeks, surgeon on board *Monitor*, gives Antoinette Nicklis his condolences on the loss of her brother, Jacob. Weeks writes that Nicklis went down with the *Monitor*. [MS363.01.08.01]
- Folder 9** Correspondence, 1868  
September 19, 1868: Bergen, NY.  
Three-page letter from Eva to Nettie (Nicklis) Leonard, sisters of Jacob Nicklis. [MS363.01.09.01]
- Folder 10** Correspondence, 1880  
July 22, 1880: Chicago, IL.  
Four-page letter to Nettie from her son, W. C. Leonard. [MS363.01.10.01]

### SOURCES CONSULTED

Dibble, Ralph. "Monitor Life Hardly Smooth Sailing." *The Buffalo News*, October 21, 1982, Metropolitan News section.

"The Weeks Brickhouse and Gardens."

<http://www.weeksbrickhouse.org/WeeksGenealogy.html>. Accessed Oct. 6, 2011.

### SUBJECTS

Nicklis, Jacob, d. 1862

Monitor (Ironclad : 1862)

United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Personal narratives

United States. Navy-Sea life