

**Guide to the William F. Keeler Letter, 1863 February
MS0457**

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

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DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository: The Mariners' Museum Library
Title: William F. Keeler Letter
Inclusive Dates: 1863 February
Catalog number: MS0457
Physical Characteristics: 1 letter
Language: English
Creator: Keeler, William Frederick, 1821-1886

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection consists of a single letter written by William F. Keeler on February 13, 1863 to David Ellis informing the latter that he had been appointed the Paymaster's Steward on USS *Florida*.

This letter is significant in that it contains the names and/or signatures of four former crewmen and officers of the US Steam Battery *Monitor*: John P. Bankhead, David R. Ellis, Samuel Dana Greene, and William F. Keeler. Greene noted on the letter the date that Ellis reported for duty and signed off; Bankhead simply wrote "Approved" and signed. Bankhead, who was captain of *Monitor* when it sank on December 31, 1862, was given command of *Florida* sometime in the winter of 1862/63 while that vessel was in New York for repairs. Bankhead requested that Greene and Keeler be assigned as his executive officer and paymaster, respectively, aboard the *Florida*, positions which both had held on *Monitor*. Keeler, in turn, requested that Ellis be assigned his steward, the same position that Ellis also had held on *Monitor*. This letter, then, documents a reunion of *Monitor*-men and indicates a special bond that existed among the officers and crew of the famous ironclad.

The collection is organized into 1 folder.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Accession Number

MS0457

Accession Date

2009

Restrictions

The collection is open to all researchers.

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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 SKETCH

William F. Keeler, the author of the letter, was born on June 9, 1821, the oldest child of Roswell Keeler and Mary Plant of Utica, NY. At the outbreak of war in 1861, Keeler was a senior partner of the La Salle Iron Works in La Salle, Illinois. Soon after the opening of the war, Keeler made application to his local congressman for a volunteer appointment. His request was granted on December 18, 1861 when he was made "Acting Assistant Paymaster and Clerk" and he reported for duty on board US Steam Battery *Monitor* on January 4, 1862. After *Monitor* foundered at sea in December 1862, Keeler, at the request of John Bankhead, was assigned to duty as Paymaster on USS *Florida*.

The *Florida*, a side-wheel steamer, was purchased and commissioned on 5 October 1861, with Lieutenant J. R. Goldsborough in command. *Florida* steamed out of New York Harbor 19 October 1861 to join the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron in patrolling the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The steamer helped capture a ship and a schooner, which were running the blockade. Returning to New York during November 1862, *Florida* was decommissioned for repairs. Keeler wrote the present letter just prior to *Florida*'s being re-commissioned 7 March 1863 for service with the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Keeler remained on duty aboard *Florida* for the remainder of the war.

After the war, according to a biography of Keeler for the *Monitor* Center, Keeler "moved his family from Illinois to Mayport, Florida. Taking on the assumed title of major, Keeler worked as a customs collector, elections inspector, and railroad paymaster until his death."

RELATED MATERIALS

The library has a typescript of David Ellis's memoir in the Battle of Hampton Roads Collection, MS0359.

FILE GUIDE

Folder 1 Correspondence, February 1862
February 13, 1863: USS *Florida*, Navy Yard, New York.
One-page letter from William F. Keeler to David Ellis.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Daly, Robert W., ed. *Aboard the USS Florida: 1863-65, The Letters of Paymaster William Frederick Keeler, U.S. Navy To His Wife, Anna*. Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1968.

Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships. Washington: Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, 1959-1981.

The Mariners' Museum. "William F. Keeler, Acting Paymaster of the USS *Monitor*."

<http://www.marinersmuseum.org/uss-monitor-center/william-f-keeler-acting-paymaster-uss-monitor> (accessed Sept. 12, 2011).

SUBJECTS

Bankhead, John Payne, 1821-1867

Ellis, David Roberts, 1840-1908

Greene, Samuel Dana, 1839-1884

Florida (Steamer : 1861)

Monitor (Ironclad : 1862)

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

United States. Navy-Appointments and retirements