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.

Publication Rights
Copies of any materials may not be reproduced, published, or distributed in any form without the expressed permission of The Mariners’ Museum.
Preferred Citation
William F. Keeler Letter, 1863 February, MS0457, The Mariners’ Museum Library

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
One-page letter from William F. Keeler to David Ellis.

SOURCES CONSULTED

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