

Charles Wilkes

A Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress

**Prepared by Joseph Sullivan and Patrick Kerwin
Revised and expanded by Laura J. Kells**



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

2003

Contact information: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/mss/address.html>

**Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress
Manuscript Division, 2002**

Finding aid URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/mss/eadmss.ms002005>

Latest revision: 2005 January

Collection Summary

Title: Papers of Charles Wilkes

Span Dates: 1607-1959

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1841-1865)

ID No.: MSS45716

Creator: Wilkes, Charles, 1798-1877

Size: 6,500 items; 45 containers plus 2 oversize plus 1 vault; 18 linear feet; 26 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Naval officer and explorer. Official and family correspondence, journals and diaries, legal and financial papers, autobiography and other writings, and scientific notebooks relating to Wilkes's command of an expedition (1838-1842) to the Antarctic, Hawaii and various other Pacific islands, and the northwest coast of the United States; his capture of J. M. Mason and John Slidell in the *Trent* affair (1861); and his command of the James River Flotilla and West India Squadron during the Civil War. Includes legal and business papers of the Wilkes family in England.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Names:

Wilkes, Charles, 1798-1877

Agassiz, Louis, 1807-1873--Correspondence

Bolton, William Compton, d. 1849--Correspondence

Dana, James Dwight, 1813-1895--Correspondence

Drayton, Joseph--Correspondence

Gray, Asa, 1810-1888--Correspondence

Mason, J. M. (James Murray), 1798-1871

McClellan, George Brinton, 1826-1885--Correspondence

Slidell, John, 1793-1871

Stuart, Fred D.--Correspondence

Welles, Gideon, 1802-1878--Correspondence

Wilkes, Eliza--Correspondence

Wilkes, Jane--Correspondence

Wilkes, Jane Renwick, d. 1843--Correspondence

Wilkes, John, 1827-1908--Correspondence

Wilkes, Mary Lynch Bolton--Correspondence

Wilkes family

United States. Navy. James River Flotilla

United States. Navy. Potomac River Flotilla

United States. Navy. West India Squadron

United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842)

Subjects:

Astronomy

Maps

Meteorology--Observations

Scientific expeditions--Antarctica

Scientific expeditions--Hawaii

Scientific expeditions--Oceania

Tides

Trent Affair, Nov. 8, 1861

Antarctica--Discovery and exploration

Hawaii--Discovery and exploration

Oceania--Discovery and exploration
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Naval operations

Occupations:

Explorers
Naval officers

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The papers of Charles Wilkes, naval officer and explorer, were chiefly the gift of Rosalee Lockwood-Jones, Mrs. M. L. Hull, and C. Denby Wilkes, 1921-1964. An addition was given by Gilbert Wilkes in 2002.

Processing History:

The papers of Charles Wilkes were processed in 1975. The register was revised in 1999 and 2003. Material received in 2002 was added to the collection in 2003.

Copyright Status:

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Charles Wilkes is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Microfilm:

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on twenty-six reels. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan.

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Charles Wilkes Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1798, Apr. 3	Born, New York, N.Y.
1815	Entered the merchant marine
1818	Appointed midshipman
1826	Married Jane Jeffrey Renwick (died 1843) Promoted to lieutenant
1833	Headed the Depot of Charts and Instruments, Washington, D.C., which later became the Naval Observatory
1838-1842	Commanded an expedition to the Antarctic, islands of the Pacific Ocean, and the American northwest coast
1843-1863	On special duty, chiefly in Washington, D.C., preparing for publication of information gathered from the expedition

1845	Published <i>Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition</i> . Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard. 5 vols.
1849	Published <i>Western America</i> . Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard
1851	Published <i>Meteorology</i> . Philadelphia: Printed by C. Sherman
1854	Married Mary H. Lynch Bolton
1857	Published <i>Theory of Zodiacal Light</i> . Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Son, Printers
1858	Published <i>Hydrography</i> . Philadelphia: Printed by C. Sherman
1859	Published <i>On the Circulation of the Oceans</i> . Philadelphia Published <i>Report on the Examination of the Deep River District, North Carolina</i> . [Washington, D.C.]
1861	While in command of the <i>San Jacinto</i> , halted the British mail steamer <i>Trent</i> and forcibly removed Confederate commissioners J. M. Mason and John Slidell
1862	Placed in command of the James River Flotilla; transferred to the command of the Potomac River Flotilla; later commanded the West India Squadron
1863	Recalled to Washington, D.C.
1864	Court-martialed
1866	Commissioned rear admiral on the retired list
1877, Feb. 8	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Charles Wilkes (1798-1877) span the years 1607-1959, with the bulk of the material dated between 1841 and 1865. The collection contains [family](#), [official](#), and [general correspondence](#) of Charles Wilkes, letterbooks of Wilkes and another United States naval officer, [journals and diaries](#), a draft [autobiography](#), scientific tracts and notes detailing weather and tidal observations, genealogical charts, newspaper clippings, Confederate currency, and printed matter. There are also marriage and building contracts, leases, inventories, promissory notes, trust agreements, and debt records dating from the seventeenth century that relate to the [Wilkes family](#) in England and America.

The papers illustrate much of Wilkes's career, including his command of an [expedition](#) of 1838-1842, which engaged in surveys and exploration of the Antarctic, islands in the Pacific Ocean, and the northwest coast of the United States. The collection also covers Wilkes's seizure of Confederate commissioners J. M. Mason and John Slidell aboard the British mail steamer *Trent* in 1861. Notebooks, observation records, and correspondence relate to the expedition, but most of the material relates to his special duty in Washington, D.C., in the period 1843-1861, when Wilkes consolidated the scientific data gathered on the mission and prepared his narrative of the voyage together with other scientific volumes for publication. With these publications came a measure of fame and recognition, not only as an explorer but also as a nautical scientist.

Wilkes's capture of the *Trent* is chiefly reflected in his correspondence for the period 1861-1862, which contains letters from committees honoring him and letters indicating favorable public reaction. More vividly portrayed are Wilkes's commands in 1862 of the James and Potomac River flotillas and of the West India Squadron operating near the Bahamas against Confederate commerce destroyers. The [General Correspondence](#) and [Letterbooks](#) series contain an exchange of letters between Gideon

Welles, George Brinton McClellan, and Wilkes touching upon the military operations of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign. Scattered references throughout the papers relate to Wilkes's [business](#) interests in the South, especially in North Carolina.

Correspondence in the papers also pertains to the Wilkes family. Included in the [Family Correspondence](#) series are letters of Charles Wilkes, his son John, daughters Jane and Eliza, his wives, Jane Renwick and Mary Lynch Bolton, and cousins and other family members. Their letters chronicle the family's celebrations and tragedies as well as their activities and interests prior to the Civil War.

Wilkes's daily records in the [Journals and Diaries](#) series record events of special interest and supplement those periods lacking in correspondence. His autobiography provides information relating to his career and personal life.

The [Miscellany](#) series includes three official letterbooks of William Compton Bolton, a United States naval officer and the first husband of Wilkes's second wife, Mary Lynch Bolton. Prior to his death in 1848, Bolton and his wife were close companions of the Wilkeses in Washington society. Originally named William Compton Bolton Finch, his name was changed in 1833. The name Finch appears on the first two volumes.

Frequent correspondents in the papers include Louis Agassiz, James Dana, Joseph Drayton, Asa Gray, George Brinton McClellan, Fred D. Stuart, and Gideon Welles.

An [addition](#) consists primarily of letters written by Wilkes to his wife, Mary, in 1863 while he was in command of the West India Squadron. The letters were sent from Cuba, the Bahamas, and Haiti. Wilkes described life at sea and efforts to capture Confederate destroyers and protect United States commerce during the Civil War and expressed his dissatisfaction with the leadership of the country.

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in thirteen series:

- [Journals and Diaries, 1841-1875](#)
- [Letterbooks, 1841-1863](#)
- [Family Correspondence, 1836-1915, n.d.](#)
- [General Correspondence, 1835-1876, n.d.](#)
- [Official Correspondence, 1862-1863, n.d.](#)
- [Expedition File, 1828-1863, 1940, n.d.](#)
- [Autobiography and Other Writings, 1855-1877, n.d.](#)
- [Financial and Business Papers, 1833-1876, n.d.](#)
- [Miscellany, 1817-1921, n.d.](#)
- [Family Papers and Genealogy, 1607-1959, n.d.](#)
- [Addition, 1861-1863, n.d.](#)
- [Oversize, 1861, n.d.](#)
- [Vault, 1864](#)

Description of Series

Container

BOX 1
REEL 1-4

Series

Journals and Diaries, 1841-1875

Diaries and journals.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 2-5
REEL 5-9

Letterbooks, 1841-1863

Bound letterpress and handwritten copies of letters sent including official and private correspondence.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 6-12
REEL 9-14

Family Correspondence, 1836-1915, n.d.

Predominantly letters exchanged between members of the Wilkes family.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 13-16
REEL 14-17

General Correspondence, 1835-1876, n.d.

Letters received and sent.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 17-19
REEL 17-18

Official Correspondence, 1862-1863, n.d.

Letters sent to and from the Navy Department, the secretary of the navy, and the Army Department.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 20-21
REEL 18-19

Expedition File, 1828-1863, 1940, n.d.

Correspondence, drafts of a narrative of the expedition, maps, notebooks, computation tables, lists, reports, and printed matter.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

BOX 22-25
REEL 20-24

Autobiography and Other Writings, 1855-1877, n.d.

Autobiography, essays and sketches by Wilkes.
Arranged by type of material.

BOX 26-27
REEL 24

Financial and Business Papers, 1833-1876, n.d.

Maps, drawings, reports, account books, copyrights, deeds, and miscellaneous material relating to property rights.
Arranged by type of material.

BOX 28-30
REEL 25-26

Miscellany, 1817-1921, n.d.

A scrapbook, newspaper clippings, photographs, maps, sketches, naval registers, printed matter, and miscellaneous correspondence. Included are three letterbooks belonging to William Compton Bolton.

Arranged by subject or by type of material.

BOX 31-45
REEL 26

Family Papers and Genealogy, 1607-1959, n.d.

Documents predominantly of a business and legal nature including apprenticeship papers, bonds, deeds, marriage contracts, and mortgages relating to the Wilkes family in England and America. Also genealogical charts, a published genealogy, and an onomastic index to many of the family records in the papers.

Indexed family papers are arranged chronologically.

Containers 32-45 not filmed

BOX 45
not filmed

Addition, 1861-1863, n.d.

Correspondence and writings.

Arranged by type of material and therein chronologically.

BOX OV 1

Oversize, 1861, n.d.

Proclamation and genealogical charts.

Arranged and described according to the series, folders, and containers from which the items were removed.

BOX VA 1

Vault, 1864

Confederate currency and bond.

Arranged and described according to the series, folder, and container from which the items were removed.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1 REEL 1-4	Journals and Diaries, 1841-1875 Diaries and journals. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1 REEL 1-4	1841-1875 (24 vols.)
BOX 2-5 REEL 5-9	Letterbooks, 1841-1863 Bound letterpress and handwritten copies of letters sent including official and private correspondence. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 2 REEL 5-6	1841, May 17-1847, Dec. 30 1848, Nov. 22-1850, Feb. 16 1850, Feb. 16-1851, Jan. 17
BOX 3 REEL 6-7	1851, Jan. 18-1854, Dec. 9 1857, Jan. 16-Oct. 25 1857, Nov. 5-1859, Feb. 13
BOX 4 REEL 7-8	1859, Feb. 17-1861, Apr. 22 1862 May 12-22 July 18- Aug. 10 Aug. 10- Sept. 2 Sept. 6-22
BOX 5 REEL 8-9	Sept. 30- Nov. 30 1862, Nov. 11-1863, Jan. 2 1863 Jan. 3-Feb. 2 Feb. 2-26 Mar. 4-Apr. 4 Apr. 4-May 12 May 12-27 May 21- June 18

Letterbooks, 1841-1863

Container

Contents

June 18

BOX 6-12
REEL 9-14

Family Correspondence, 1836-1915, n.d.

Predominantly letters exchanged between members of the Wilkes family.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 6
REEL 9-10

1836, Oct.-1850, July

(13 folders)

BOX 7
REEL 10-11

Aug. 1850-May 1853

(10 folders)

BOX 8
REEL 11

1853, June-1855, Dec.

(10 folders)

BOX 9
REEL 12

1856, Jan.-1858, Aug.

(12 folders)

BOX 10
REEL 12-13

1858, Sept.-1862, Oct.

(14 folders)

BOX 11
REEL 13

1863, Jan.-1867, Oct.; 1887, May

(12 folders)

BOX 12
REEL 14

1895, July-1915, Oct.

(7 folders)

Undated

(3 folders)

BOX 13-16
REEL 14-17

General Correspondence, 1835-1876, n.d.

Letters received and sent.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 13
REEL 14-15

1835-1856

(22 folders)

BOX 14
REEL 15-16

1857-1862

(22 folders)

BOX 15
REEL 16

1863-1870

(10 folders)

BOX 16
REEL 17

1871-1876, n.d.

(6 folders)

General Correspondence, 1835-1876, n.d.

Container

Contents

Fragments, n.d.

BOX 17-19
REEL 17-18

Official Correspondence, 1862-1863, n.d.

Letters sent to and from the Navy Department, the secretary of the navy, and the Army Department.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 17

1862, July 6-Dec. 18
(8 folders)

BOX 18
REEL 17-18

1862, Dec. 19-1863, May 11
(7 folders)

BOX 19
REEL 18

1863, May 12-July 30, n.d.
(4 folders)

BOX 20-21
REEL 18-19

Expedition File, 1828-1863, 1940, n.d.

Correspondence, drafts of a narrative of the expedition, maps, notebooks, computation tables, lists, reports, and printed matter.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

BOX 20
REEL 18-19

Correspondence, 1940

Maps, Antarctica and Hawaii

Narrative, 1838

Bound volume

Shortened copy

Notebooks

Use of astronomical instruments, [1828?]

"Instructions to New Officers on Methods of Surveying Used in the Expedition," 1858

Observations

Weather and tidal observations, 1839

BOX 21
REEL 19

Journal of tides, air, and water observations, 1839-1840

General, 1841

Columbia River, n.d.

Pendulum on Mauna Loa, computations, 1841

Publications

Correspondence on publications concerning the expedition, 1842-1862

Zoology, by Titian Ramsay Peale, introduction to, 1846-1848

Reports

American Philosophical Society and the United States Naval Lyceum, 1836

Joint Committee on the Library, United States Congress, 1858-1859

Soo Loo agreement, 1842

Surveys, original list of islands discovered and surveyed for the first time, n.d.

Naval hearings, charges and defense of Wilkes, 1842, 1847

Expedition File, 1828-1863, 1940, n.d.

Container

Contents

Miscellany, 1861-1863, n.d.

BOX 22-25
REEL 20-24

Autobiography and Other Writings, 1855-1877, n.d.

Autobiography, essays and sketches by Wilkes.
Arranged by type of material.

BOX 22
REEL 20-21

Autobiography

Draft

Vols. 1-8

(4 folders)

BOX 23
REEL 22-23

Vols. 9-10

Typescript

pp. 1-300

(3 folders)

BOX 24
REEL 23

pp. 301-882

(6 folders)

Essays and sketches

Report on the examination of the Deep River District, North Carolina, 1858

(2 folders)

"Theory of the Winds," 1855

(2 folders)

BOX 25
REEL 24

"On the Circulation of the Oceans," 1859

"Visit to Tunis" and "The Housewife," 1859

"The Student's Lamp," "In Turn," and "Christmas Story," 1859

"On Postal Arrangements," "How I Was Cured of Going to Fires," and "Sketches of Biography," 1859

"Some Days in the Session," 1877

"Reasons for Taking the *Vanderbilt* Under Command," 1863

"A Diary From the South Sea Islands," n.d.

Description of a trip through the Midwest, n.d.

BOX 26-27
REEL 24

Financial and Business Papers, 1833-1876, n.d.

Maps, drawings, reports, account books, copyrights, deeds, and miscellaneous material relating to property rights.

Arranged by type of material.

BOX 26
REEL 24

Maps and papers relating to the Dauphine and Susquehanna Coal Co., n.d.

Drawings of blast furnaces, scales, and coal kilns, n.d.

Map indicating Wilkes property in Washington, D.C., n.d.

Report on the High Shoals property in Gaston County, N.C., n.d.

Account book, 1870

Financial and Business Papers, 1833-1876, n.d.

Container

Contents

	Bills, checks, and receipts, 1850-1873 (1 folder)
BOX 27 REEL 24	(3 folders)
	Copyrights, deeds, and property rights, 1833-1876, n.d.
BOX 28-30 REEL 25-26	Miscellany, 1817-1921, n.d. A scrapbook, newspaper clippings, photographs, maps, sketches, naval registers, printed matter, and miscellaneous correspondence. Included are three letterbooks belonging to William Compton Bolton. Arranged by subject or by type of material.
BOX 28 REEL 25	Bills, letters, and notes relating to the United States Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1867-1869 Navy registers, 1828-1831, 1845 Coast Survey, 1855 Court-martial defense of Wilkes, 1864 <i>United States v. S.S. Peterhoff</i> , 1864 Maps and papers relating to Deep River District of North Carolina, 1851-1857, n.d. Biographical sketches of Wilkes, 1912, n.d. <i>Trent</i> affair, monographs, 1861-1865, n.d. <i>See also Oversize</i> Winds and Currents of the Sea, by Matthew Fontaine Maury, 1851
BOX 29 REEL 25-26	Confederate money and bond, 1864 <i>See Vault</i> Photographs, 1900, n.d. Scrapbook, 1856-1913, n.d. General, 1846-1921, n.d. Newspaper clippings (3 folders)
BOX 30 REEL 26	Letterbooks of William Compton Bolton (formerly William Compton Bolton Finch) 1817, Dec. 11-1818, Dec. 9 1823, Nov. 4-1824, May 11 1839, June 13-1841, Mar. 9
not filmed	Interest statements, lists, and receipts, 1870-1873, n.d.
BOX 31-45 REEL 26	Family Papers and Genealogy, 1607-1959, n.d. Documents predominantly of a business and legal nature including apprenticeship papers, bonds, deeds, marriage contracts, and mortgages relating to the Wilkes family in England and America. Also genealogical charts, a published genealogy, and an onomastic index to many of the family records in the papers. Indexed family papers are arranged chronologically. Containers 32-45 not filmed
BOX 31 REEL 26	Agreements, appraisals, building estimates, debt records, letters, receipts, inventories, termination of trusts, 1669-1814

Family Papers and Genealogy, 1607-1959, n.d.

Container

Contents

	Onomastic index, a partial index of the Wilkes family parchments and other family records contained in the papers, n.d.
	Wilkes chronology, 1959
	Genealogical notes pertaining to the Wilkes family, typewritten copies, 1728-1869
BOX 32 not filmed	Indexed documents
	Index, 1951
	Nos. 1-11, 1607-1616, 1635, 1644 (12 folders)
BOX 33	Nos. 12-25, 1646-1647, 1655-1667, 1679-1684 (14 folders)
BOX 34	Nos. 26-36, 1685, 1693-1698 (11 folders)
BOX 35	Nos. 37-46, 1701-1705 (10 folders)
BOX 36	Nos. 47-57, 1706-1710 (11 folders)
BOX 37	Nos. 58-64, 1714-1718 (7 folders)
BOX 38	Nos. 65-72, 1720-1727 (8 folders)
BOX 39	Nos. 73-79, 1728-1735 (7 folders)
BOX 40	Nos. 80-87, 1738-1745 (9 folders)
BOX 41	Nos. 88-94, 1746-1747 (7 folders)
BOX 42	Nos. 88-94, 1746-1747 (7 folders)
BOX 43	Nos. 101-105, 1757-1760 (5 folders)
BOX 44	Nos. 106-115, 1761-1771, 1784 (10 folders)
BOX 45	Nos. 116-117, 1791-1792 (3 folders)
	Genealogical charts, n.d. <i>See also Oversize</i>
	Miscellaneous documents, 1683-1684, 1712-1747, 1761, 1790, n.d. (4 folders)
BOX 45 not filmed	Addition, 1861-1863, n.d.
	Correspondence and writings. Arranged by type of material and therein chronologically.
BOX 45	Correspondence, 1861-1863, n.d.

Addition, 1861-1863, n.d.

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
	Writings on High Shoals, N.C., n.d
BOX OV 1	Oversize, 1861, n.d. Proclamation and genealogical charts. Arranged and described according to the series, folders, and containers from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Miscellany
BOX OV 2	<i>Trent</i> affair, proclamation, 1861 (Container 28) Family Papers and Genealogy Genealogical charts, n.d.(Container 45)
BOX VA 1	Vault, 1864 Confederate currency and bond. Arranged and described according to the series, folder, and container from which the items were removed.
BOX VA 1	Miscellany Confederate money and bond, 1864 (Container 29; Reel 25)