

# Guide to the William Findlay Shunk Papers

MS 449



compiled by Staff of Manuscripts and Archives

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
Yale University Library  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 449

**CREATOR:** Shunk, William Findlay, 1830-1907

**TITLE:** William Findlay Shunk papers

**DATES:** 1828-1903

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 0.5 linear feet (1 box)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Correspondence, journal, speeches and miscellanea of William F. Shunk and his family. Shunk exchanged letters with family members in Pennsylvania while sailing around the world, circa 1846-1849. The sloop, *Preble*, stopped in many ports, including Cape Verdes, Rio de Janiero, Hawaii, Hong Kong, and Canton, China. Speeches of his father, Francis Rawn Shunk, governor of Pennsylvania, are also included.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0449>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0449>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to [http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr\\_copy\\_order.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html). The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Charles Eberstadt, 1963.

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## Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

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## Preferred Citation

William Findlay Shunk Papers (MS 449). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

Civil engineer; graduate of Dickinson College; midshipman, U.S.N. 1846-1850; in Pennsylvania Railroad service, 1851-1856; assistant engineer, Lewisburg and Spruce Creek Railroad, 1856-1857; clerk in State Department, Washington, 1861-1865; Rock Island U.S. Govt. surveys, 1865-1866; assistant engineer, Dutchess and Columbia Railroad, 1867; chief engineer, Connecticut Western Railroad, 1868-1874; chief engineer in New York City, Pennsylvania, Ecuador, 1876-1902.

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## Scope and Contents

The collection comprises 426 items, including family correspondence, drawings, poems, and speeches from the period 1828 to 1903. Of primary interest is the material pertaining to William Findlay Shunk's years as a midshipman of the U.S. Sloop of War *Preble* and its Pacific cruises during the period 1846-1850.

When sixteen years of age, William Findlay Shunk, 1830-1907, a younger son of Francis Rawn Shunk (1788-1848), governor of Pennsylvania (1845-1848), decided to go to sea. His influential father successfully petitioned the Secretary of the Navy, George Bancroft, to give him a Midshipman's warrant. Young Shunk was assigned to the Sloop of War *Preble*, which outfitted at Brooklyn's Navy Yards and sailed September 25, 1846, for Macao via the Cape Verdes, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Horn, Callao (Peru), Monterey, San Francisco, Hawaii, Hong Kong, and Canton to return in time via Hawaii, Benicia (California), Ursenal, and Panama. His letters home give wonderful vignettes of sea life through the eyes of an intelligent and sensitive youth. Many interesting items are recounted in these letters, such as his descriptions of life in the city of Lima, the California campaign against Mexico, and Hawaiian experiences.

One of the friends whom William F. Shunk made aboard the ship was F. L. (Frederick Lewis) Hanks, whose twenty-eight-page personal journal of the voyage of the *Preble* to Nagasaki in 1849, kept expressly for Shunk, is included in this collection. It recounts in detail how the captain of the vessel demanded from the Daimyo and obtained the release of certain American whalers who had been unlawfully imprisoned by the Japanese. Little known and all but forgotten today, this voyage into the forbidden waters of Japan by one unescorted sloop was a most significant precursor of Commodore Matthew G. Perry, who employed a squadron to formally open the country to the Western world nearly five years later.

An interesting addition to these narratives of sea life are the sketches Shunk made of the places the *Preble* visited. Several of them are of Hawaii, which made a lasting impression upon him.

In later life, as a structural engineer, Shunk wrote two authoritative books on railroad bridges, curves, and grades.

Also in this collection are some 243 interfamilial letters between Shunk's parents, Governor and Mrs. Francis Rawn Shunk, himself, and various brothers, sisters and cousins dating from 1828 through 1903, but written principally between 1846 and 1866. Together with these are thirty-six early poems by Shunk, sixty-three odd pages of speeches composed by Gov. Shunk for delivery before the Pennsylvania Assemblies, and some other miscellaneous items. The family letters are mainly from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, except that the majority of brother Caspar's are from Cornwall Furnace, Pennsylvania.

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## **Arrangement**

Collection was inventoried as received from the donor.

## Collection Contents

b. 1, f. 1	<p>Letters from William F. Shunk to his parents from Brooklyn, New York (thirteen items)</p> <p>These were the first to be written by him from aboard the <i>Preble</i>, while waiting to set sail from New York.</p>	<p>1846 August 15-1846 September 25</p>
<p>A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.</p>		
<p>Letters from William F. Shunk to his parents during the voyage from Brooklyn to Macao and the return as far as Honolulu (thirty-seven items)</p>		
b. 1, f. 2	<p>Recounting the voyage of the <i>Preble</i> from Brooklyn to Callao and Lima, Peru</p> <p>A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.</p>	<p>1847 February 26-1847 April 18</p>
b. 1, f. 3	<p>Recounting the voyage from Lima to San Francisco, Monterey, Panama, Mazatlan, and again to Callao and back to Monterey</p> <p>A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.</p>	<p>1847 April 18-1848 June 6</p>
b. 1, f. 4	<p>Recounting the voyage from San Blas to Hawaii and on to Boca Tigris, Whampoa, and Shanghai and return to Honolulu</p> <p>A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.</p>	<p>1848 June 21-1849 November 12</p>
b. 1, f. 5	<p>Letters from William F. Shunk to his mother recounting the long stay aboard the <i>Preble</i> at Benicia, California, after his return from China and Hawaii</p> <p>A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.</p>	<p>1850 February 22-May 2</p>
b. 1, f. 6	<p>Journal of a cruise in the U.S.S. <i>Plymouth</i>, Commodore D. Geisinger and J.R. Gedney commanding</p> <p>A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.</p>	<p>1849 May 2-28</p>
b. 1, f. 7	<p>Journal, kept for William F. Shunk by his old shipmate F. L. (Frederick Lewis) Hanks, of a cruise in the <i>Preble</i> from Hong Kong to Okinawa, and then to Nagasaki, Japan</p> <p>A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.</p>	<p>1849</p>
b. 1, f. 8	<p>Naval Commissions and letters signed by George Bancroft, Gov. Shunk, and two other secretaries of the Navy concerning William F. Shunk's appointment aboard the U.S. Sloop of War <i>Preble</i></p> <p>A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.</p>	<p>1846-1850</p>

b. 1, f. 9	Poems by William F. Shunk, written in long hand A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	After 1843
b. 1, f. 10 - 12	Letters from Jane Shunk to her son William F. Shunk (eighty-two letters) A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1845-1867
b. 1, f. 13 - 14	Letters from Lilly Shunk (Brown) to her brother William F. Shunk (twenty-four letters) A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1842-1893
b. 1, f. 15-16	Letters from Caspar Shunk to his younger brother William F. Shunk (sixty-one letters) A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1846-1858
b. 1, f. 17-18	Letters from Jane Shunk to her daughter Gertrude (forty-six letters) A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1852-1867
b. 1, f. 19	Miscellaneous letters, invitations, and other materials from friends and family of Shunk A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1828-1903
b. 1, f. 20-21	Speeches and other materials, written in long hand, prepared by Governor Francis Rawn Shunk of Pennsylvania A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	1845-1848
b. 1, f. 22	Pen and pencil sketches by William F. Shunk (forty-seven items) Many of the sketches include hand-written annotations and some correspondence. A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at <a href="mailto:beinecke.library@yale.edu">beinecke.library@yale.edu</a> to request access to the digital copy.	Circa 1846-1850

## **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.

### **Subjects**

Sailors' writings  
Seafaring life  
Shipping  
Sloops  
Voyages around the world

### **Geographic Names**

Asia  
Latin America  
Middle Atlantic States

### **Genres / Formats**

Diaries

### **Names**

Hanks, Frederick Lewis  
Shunk, Francis Rawn, 1788-1848  
Shunk, William Findlay, 1830-1907

### **Corporate Body**

Eben Preble (Ship)