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## Commentary—The Naval Historical Collection: Recent Acquisitions

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## COMMENTARY

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### THE NAVAL HISTORICAL COLLECTION: RECENT ACQUISITIONS

*Evelyn M. Cherpak*

The Naval War College Library's naval historical collection, located in Mahan Hall, is the depository for college archives, manuscript collections, and oral histories that document the history of the institution, naval warfare, and the presence of the U.S. Navy in Narragansett Bay. During the past year, several historically significant manuscript collections and single items have been acquired. One such collection relates to the career of the college's founder and first president, Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce. It consists of his warrant to master dated 15 September 1855 and his commission to lieutenant dated 16 September 1855, both signed by President Franklin Pierce and Secretary of the Navy James C. Dobbin; his commission to commodore dated 25 November 1881, signed by President Chester A. Arthur and Secretary of the Navy William H. Hunt; and a certificate appointing Luce as U.S. Commissioner General to the Columbian Historical Exposition in Madrid, Spain, in 1892, with signatures of President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State James Blaine. Letters of appointment to master and lieutenant, a letter from the U.S. Naval Academy Board of Exam-

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iners in 1849 indicating that Luce passed his exams, and a three-page holograph history of his ship and shore assignments dating from 1849 to 1865, written by Luce himself and dated 14 July 1866, complete the acquisition. These items fill a gap in the College's holdings on its founder and are important for institutional history.

Papers of enlisted men are rare finds; hence, the William H. Sellers Collection, which documents his naval career as a chief yeoman from 1887 to 1922, is

especially valuable. Sellers was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, enlisted in the Navy at age sixteen, and saw action during the Spanish-American War at the battle of Santiago Bay in USS *Gloucester*, J. P. Morgan's former yacht *Corsair*. He received a West Indies medal for rescuing Spanish admiral Pascual Cervera from the sea. During World War I, Sellers was in charge of the Red Cross Bank at the U.S. Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island. After his retirement from the Navy, he served as a clerk in the Supply Department at the U.S. Naval Torpedo Station in Newport for eighteen years. He retired from the Torpedo Station in 1940 and died in 1942.

His papers include official naval and personal correspondence dating from 1902 to 1936; rare editions of books, including a 1913 edition of the *Bluejacket's Manual*, a 1902 edition of the *Petty Officer's Drill Book*, and the 1899 log of USS *Gloucester*; pamphlets, including *The History of the U.S. Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island*, published in 1915; and a history of Victoria, Australia, and its metropolis dated 1908. There are also various editions of the *Newport Recruit*, World War II editions of the *Newport Daily News*, and the *Newport Herald* from 1945, as well as photographs of USS *Hartford*, USS *Gloucester*, and sailors at the Newport Naval Training Station in 1918. Miscellaneous items are a Crossing the Line Certificate and the script of the ceremony, a blueprint of the battle of Santiago Bay, and a 1912 photo of the wreck of the USS *Maine*, artillery shells (one from the *Maine*), a mariner's telescope, and a pair of binoculars. His books are located in the library's rare book collection, while the artifacts are in the Naval War College Museum collection. The Sellers papers contain unique materials that shed light on the naval career of an enlisted man in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The collection was presented to the Naval War College Foundation by Mrs. Catherine Kelley-Watson and Mrs. Mary C. McNally.

The manuscripts of Admiral Sir James Hawkins Whitshed, Royal Navy, were recently presented to the Naval War College Foundation by Captain Lawrence A. Kurtz, U.S. Navy (Ret.). They consist of documents, books, and records from the American Revolution through the Napoleonic Wars to 1849. The collection houses correspondence Whitshed both sent and received while squadron commander in the Mediterranean, 1799–1802; letters received when he was naval adviser to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, from 1803 to 1804; letters sent and received when he was captain of HMS *Formidable*, and a letterbook dated 1808–09; and order books containing the admiral's orders given and received while he was commanding officer of HMS *Rose* and HMS *Temeraire*, dated 1784–86 and 1799–1801, respectively, and when he was commander in chief of Royal Navy ships off the coast of Ireland, from 1807 to 1809. The latter contains information about American sailors who were held by Royal Navy ships under Whitshed's

command. There are several signal books, copies of track charts, and the admiral's flag-rank commissions; instructions for the conduct of ships of war; general instructions and notes for courts-martial; and sailing instructions for the east coast of North America. There is also an unpublished biography of Whitshed entitled *Admiral of the Wooden Navy*, prepared by Captain Kurtz. A log from the HMS *Thetis* and HMS *St. Vincent* that belonged to the admiral's grandson and namesake, and several copies of the *Dublin Chronicle* containing articles covering the American Revolution complete the holdings.

This is a remarkable collection of a flag officer of the Royal Navy during the latter part of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, when Great Britain possessed the most formidable navy in the world.

Researchers interested in visiting the Naval Historical Collection should contact the curator, Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak, at (401) 841-2435, fax (401) 841-7790, or [cherpake@nwc.navy.mil](mailto:cherpake@nwc.navy.mil) for an appointment. The collection is open Monday through Friday, 0800 to 1630, except for federal holidays.