

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum  
Record Unit 268**

**Captain Edwin Coffin and the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition, 1850-1917**

By Hilary Wall

**Descriptive Summary**

**Repository:** Martha's Vineyard Museum

**Call No.**

**Title:** Captain Edwin Coffin and the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition, 1850-1917

**Creator:** various

**Quantity:** .5 cubic feet

**Abstract:** Record Unit 268: Captain Edwin Coffin and the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition is a compilation of newspaper and magazine articles, ship logs, records and journals that document the life of Captain Edwin Coffin, the Fiala-Ziegler expedition to the North Pole and the loss of the *America* in Teplitz Bay.

**Administrative Information**

**Acquisition Information:** This collection was acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum in \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.

**Processing Information:** Hilary Wall

**Access Restrictions:** none

**Use Restrictions:** none

**Preferred citation for publication:** Martha's Vineyard Museum, Captain Edwin Coffin and the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition, 1850-1917, Record Unit 268.

**Index Terms**

- Coffin, Captain Edwin Jr.
- Edgartown, Massachusetts
- Fiala-Ziegler Expedition
- The America*
- Arctic exploration
- Ziegler, William
- Fiala, Anthony
- Franz Josef Land

**Series and Subseries Arrangement**

Series I: Newspaper Clippings and Articles

    Subseries A: Biographical material

    Subseries B: The Fiala-Ziegler Expedition, 1903-1905

Series II: Captain's Journals, 1900-1905

Series III: Loose Journal Pages,

Series IV: Captain's Records, 1904-1905

## Series V: Original Newspaper Clippings

### **Historical Note:**

The collection of records in Record Unit 268 has been “artificially” created. There is no original order to these documents. Rather, it is assumed that the organization’s librarians, interns, and volunteers have brought these records together at some point. The institution’s own records do not shade any light on when and why the collection was originally formed. What is known is that the MVM was founded in 1922. And, the organization began to collect documents in 1923. Thus the formation of this record unit can only be dated to sometime between 1923 and the present day. The processing of this collection in 2010 has largely kept this artificial collection together.

### **Scope and Content Note:**

Captain Edwin Coffin was born on June 30, 1850 in Edgartown. As an adult, he was regarded for his exceptional experience as a captain and whaler. This collection contains newspaper articles and clippings, ship logs, records and journals that document the life of Captain Edwin Coffin, the Fiala-Ziegler expedition to the North Pole and the loss of the *America* in Teplitz Bay, Franz Josef Land.

At 15, Edwin Coffin left Edgartown to be a cabin boy on the *Champion*, captained by Thomas Worth. In the early 1870’s, he embarked on two trips from New York to Galveston serving as the quartermaster and second mate of the Mallory Line Steamer, *State of Texas*. In 1876, Coffin sailed as preventer and boatsteerer on the whaling bark *Seine*, captained by Henry Clay. He would continue to sail throughout the 1880’s with other whaling ships including *Gazelle*, *Bounding Billow*, *Hidalgo*, and *Orca*. His various voyages took him across the Arctic, the North and South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean.

In 1885, Edwin Coffin married Carrie Crawford Norton. They would have four children: Irving Haven Coffin, Carrie Louise Coffin, Edna Crawford Coffin, and Edwin Coffin, Jr.

From 1889 to 1898 he was master of the schooner *Rosario* and commanded her when she was lost in the attempt to save the steam whaler *Narvarch* in 1898. Later that year, Coffin served as first mate to captain McKenna on the steam whaler *Fearless*. A journal from 1900 survives in this collection that documents his experience with the Corwin Trading Co., as officer on the steamer *Corwin* sailing from Nome to Seattle, carrying freight and passengers.

In 1902, Captain Coffin was chosen to command the steamer *America*, which carried the Fiala-Ziegler Expedition. The ship was to cross the Atlantic to

Tromsø, Norway where the ship would be moored. On June 23, 1903 the *America* set out for Archangel, Russia, where furs for clothing and an extra twenty-five dogs and twenty-five ponies were taken on. Difficult ice conditions meant that Cape Flora, Northbrook Island, was not reached until August 12<sup>th</sup>. To reach the desired Rudolf Island, the *America* had to be forced through the ice-congested British Channel. On August 31, the ship had reached 82°14'N before turning back to anchor in Teplitz Bay.

Captain Coffin took the *America* to Teplitz Joseph Land, the most northern point of Franz Josef Land that, at the time, was three degrees from the "farthest north" record. Here a wooden hut was erected to accommodate the sixteen members of the shore party, alongside tents to shelter the dogs and ponies. A cable that linked the hut to the ship's generator provided electric lighting. On October 22, the ship broke loose in a storm. By December 12, the ship sank as a result of being crushed by the intense ice pressure. Several bases offering food and shelter had been set up by earlier expeditions in southern Franz Josef Land, most notably at Cape Flora by Frederick Jackson and on Alger Island by Evelyn Baldwin. The steamer *Terra Nova* rescued the 37 survivors from the expedition in South Franz Josef land on July 30, 1905.

Captain Coffin was an active and valued member of the community. He was an honorary member of The Home Club of Edgartown and was also a member of the American Geographical Society. He had been an Edgartown selectmen for eight years and at the time of his death on October 11, 1917 was the chairman of the board.

## **Series Descriptions**

### **Series I: Newspaper Clippings and Articles**

#### **Subseries A: Biographical Material**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1: Article, "Sought Pole Once: Captain E. Coffin Now Elected Selectman of Edgartown," from the *New Bedford Standard*, March 1912, photocopy (see Folder 7 for original copy); Clipping, "Capt. Coffin Banqueted," from the *Vineyard Gazette*, undated, photocopy; Obituary for Edwin Coffin, October 18, 1917, likely from *Vineyard Gazette*, photocopy (see Folder 6 for original clipping).

#### **Subseries B: The Fiala-Ziegler Expedition, 1903-1905**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 2: Article, "Capts Coffin and Tilton Are Wanted by Ziegler," *The Boston Sunday Globe*, February 14, photocopy; Article, "Edwin Coffin to command Fiala-Ziegler Arctic expedition," *Boston Herald*, January 29, 1903, photocopy; Clipping, "Capt. Coffin of Edgartown to Try for the North Pole," January 30, 1903, photocopy; Newspaper clipping announcing the departure of the Fiala-Ziegler

Expedition, possibly from *New Bedford Standard*, undated, photocopy; "The Loss of The America," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 24, unknown year, photocopy (see Folder 7 for original copy). Magazine clipping, "From the Geographic Archives: Out of This World," *National Geographic*, January 2000, recognizes Anthony Fiala and the Fiala-Ziegler expedition; Article, "An Arctic circle: Heddi Siebel is on a quest: to retrace, for the sake of art, her grandfather's polar journey," *The Boston Globe*, February 21, 2001.

## **Series II: Captain's Journals, 1900-1905**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 3: Bound journal with various entries from 1900 to 1905. Includes entries kept by Edwin Coffin while on steamer *Corwin*, from Seattle to the Arctic Ocean, May 15, 1900 to October 13, 1900, pg. 10-53; Loose letter of correspondence, possibly from 1868, between pages 86 and 97; A test on ship procedure with approximately 131 questions, undated, pg. 60-108; Notes on how to find the correction and deviation of the compass by an amplitude, undated, pg. 116-127; Journal entry by Captain Edwin Coffin while on the *America*, July 10, 1903, pg. 128; Continuation of journal kept by Captain Edwin Coffin of Fiala-Ziegler expedition, October 8, 1904 to January 24, 1905, pg. 130-199.

Folder 4: Private Journal from the voyage of the *America*, written by Captain Edwin Coffin, 1903-1904.

## **Series III: Loose Journal Pages, 1903-1905**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 5: Unbound journal from Fiala-Ziegler expedition, January to July 1903; loose journal pages from Fiala-Ziegler expedition, April 15 to April 19, 1903; loose journal pages from Fiala-Ziegler expedition, undated; Unbound journal pages, written by Captain Edwin Coffin, Cape Flora, January 25 to July 23, 2005; loose journal pages kept by Captain Edwin Coffin from May 19 to July 29, 2005, documents first sighting of the rescue ship *Terra Nova*.

## **Series IV: Captain's Records, 1904-1905**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 6: Records and other notes, written by Captain Edwin Coffin while on Elmwood, Nosthbrook Island, 1904-1905. (Includes original clipping of obituary attached to inside of front cover).

## **Series V: Original Newspaper Clippings**

Box 1 of 1

Folder 7: Article, "Sought Pole Once: Captain E. Coffin Now Elected Selectman of Edgartown," from the *New Bedford Standard*, March 1912; Article, "The Loss of The America," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 24, unknown year.

For Further Reference: Fiala, Anthony. *Fighting the Polar Ice*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1906. (Rare Books, 639 F9.1).