

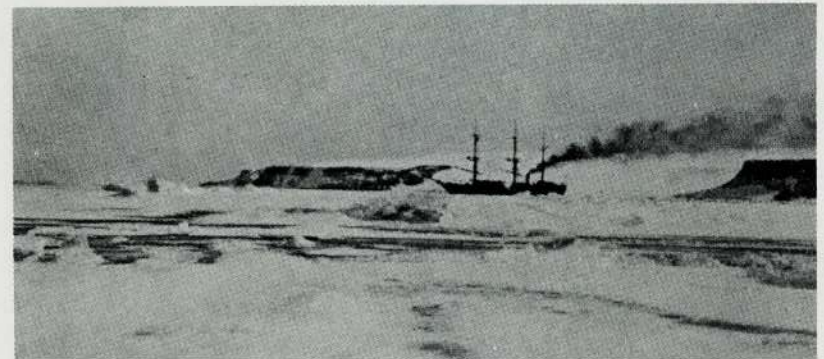
Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 40, NO. 1

AUGUST 1998



*Capt. Edwin Coffin butts the steamer into thick pack ice on the way to Teplitz Bay.*

**Two Years on a Frozen Island**

## Shipwrecked 525 Miles from North Pole With Captain Coffin of Edgartown

PART ONE

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

**Moments in History**

## Holmes Hole Welcomes the Bartletts

by JOAN DRUETT

## *Documents: A Running Account Of Matter & Things*

by HENRY BAYLIES

### MEMBERSHIP DUES

Student	\$20
Individual	\$30
Family	\$50
Sustaining	\$75
Patron	\$150
Benefactor	\$250

Dues are tax deductible, except for \$8,  
the cost of *The Intelligencer*.

Printed at daRosa's, Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts.

### CREDITS

In the article that starts on page 3, all photographs except that of Capt. Edwin Coffin, p. 13, are from the book, *Fighting the Polar Ice*, by Anthony Fiala, 1907.

# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

Vol. 40, No. 1

© 1998 M. V. H. S.

August 1998

### Two Years on a Frozen Island

Shipwrecked 525 Miles from North Pole  
With Captain Coffin of Edgartown

3

PART ONE

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

### Moments in History

Holmes Hole Welcomes the Bartletts

42

by JOAN DRUETT

### Documents

A Running Account of Matter & Things

44

by HENRY BAYLIES

Editor: Arthur R. Railton

Founding Editor: Gale Huntington (1959-1977)

*The Dukes County Intelligencer* is published quarterly by the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society (formerly the Dukes County Historical Society). Subscription is by membership in the Society. Copies of all issues may be purchased at the Society's library, Cooke and School Streets, Edgartown, Massachusetts.

Memberships are solicited. Applications should be sent to P. O. Box 827, Edgartown, MA, 02539. Telephone: 508 627 4441. Fax: 508 627 4436. Authors' queries and manuscripts for the journal should be addressed there also.

Articles in *The Intelligencer* do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Society or its officers. Every effort is made to confirm dates, names and events in published articles, but we cannot guarantee total accuracy.

ISSN 0418 1379

## MARTHA'S VINEYARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

David B. Vietor, *President*  
Hugh Knipmeyer, *1st Vice President*  
Robert Lunbeck, *2nd Vice President*  
Catherine Merwin Mayhew, *Secretary*  
Anthony K. Van Riper, *Assistant Secretary*  
Frederick W. Kingsley, *Treasurer*  
Edward W. Vincent, Jr., *President Emeritus*

### COUNCIL

Carroll Moshier, James B. Richardson III, Barbara B. Rowe,  
Sharon Scott-Ell, Donald Vose -- 1998  
Judith Bruguere, John S. Carter, Craig Dripps, Thomas Hale,  
Charlotte I. Hall, David G. Pritchard -- 1999  
Malcolm Goodridge, Townsend R. Morey, Jr.,  
Christopher J. Morse, Joseph E. Sollitto Jr.,  
Peter B. Van Tassel, Elizabeth St. John Villard -- 2000

### ADVISORY COUNCIL

John A. Howland      Kenneth A. Southworth III  
Lane Lovell      Frederick Williams

### STAFF

Bruce Andrews, *Director*  
Jill Bouck, *Chief Curator*  
Michele Moore, *Director of Development*  
Linsey Lee, *Curator of Oral History*  
Peter B. Van Tassel, *Archivist/Librarian\**  
Catherine Merwin Mayhew, *Genealogist\**  
Dorothea R. Looney, *Registrar\**  
Arthur R. Railton, *Editor\**

\* Unpaid volunteer

The Martha's Vineyard Historical Society was founded in 1922 as the Dukes County Historical Society. The name was changed by the members at the annual meeting in Edgartown, August 1996. A non-profit institution supported entirely by members' dues, contributions and bequests, its purpose is to preserve and publish the history of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands.

The Society maintains the Thomas Cooke House, circa 1740, a house museum of Island history, open to the public from mid-June to mid-October. Open all year on the Society's grounds at Cooke and School Streets, Edgartown, are the Francis Foster Gallery, the Capt. Francis Pease House and the Gale Huntington Library of History, as are the Gay Head Lighthouse exhibit with its 1854 Fresnel lens and the Carriage Shed containing an 1854 Button fire engine and many examples of Vineyard memorabilia, including the gravestones of Nancy Luce's favorite hens, circa 1860.

All buildings are open free to members; non-members are charged a nominal fee. Research assistance is provided at the Gale Huntington Library.

You are invited to join the Society. With membership you will receive this journal four times a year. To join, write to the Society, P.O. Box 827, Edgartown, MA 02539.

## Two Years on a Frozen Island

# Shipwrecked 525 Miles from North Pole With Captain Coffin of Edgartown

PART ONE

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

EDWIN A. Coffin Jr., was born on North Water Street, Edgartown, in 1850. His father, Captain Coffin Sr., a whaling master, was a veteran of 25 years at sea. When Edwin Junior was born, his father was just starting on a voyage that lasted until 1853. It was his last whaling voyage, but he wasn't finished with the sea. Ten years later, during the Civil War, he joined the U.S. Navy as an officer. Coming home from the war, he sold the Edgartown house overlooking the harbor and bought a farm in Tisbury. He had seen enough salt water for one lifetime apparently.

His wife, Hannah, was the daughter of former Customs Collector John Presbury Norton. When he died, she inherited the family home, which stood next to the house Captain Coffin had sold, the house in which Edwin Junior was born.

Edwin Junior also married into the Norton family, but into a tribe different from his mother's. His bride was Caroline C. Norton (1860-1907), daughter of Richard E. Norton. Edwin was 35, she 25, when they married and moved into the house his mother had inherited, the house next door to his birthplace. Thus when he died in 1917 at 67 years, Edwin had called only two houses home, both on North Water Street only a few feet apart.

But Edwin didn't spend much time in either house or even in Edgartown. He went to sea at 15. By 1889, he was a whaling master as his father had been. By this time, the whaling fleet was sailing from San Francisco, not New Bedford. Whaling grounds were now in the Arctic Ocean and voyages were brief, their length limited by ice floes. He was master on eight such voyages before signing on as First Mate on the steamer Corwin, a scheduled vessel running between Seattle and Nome, Alaska. He retired in 1908 and lived until his death in the house next to his birthplace.

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is the Editor of this journal.



His life had been one of adventure. Two vessels under his command were crushed by Arctic ice floes. He once told a reporter, "I believe I can safely claim one of the farthest [sic] north shipwrecks on record, at 82 degrees 35 minutes North latitude." He was a bit off on his latitude. The ship, the *America*, was crushed at 81 degrees 50 minutes North. But he had taken her to 82 degrees 13 minutes 50 seconds North latitude, a record for steamers in 1903 -- perhaps still. When crushed, the *America* was in Teplitz Bay, the base camp of the Fiala-Ziegler Polar Expedition, 525 miles from the North Pole.

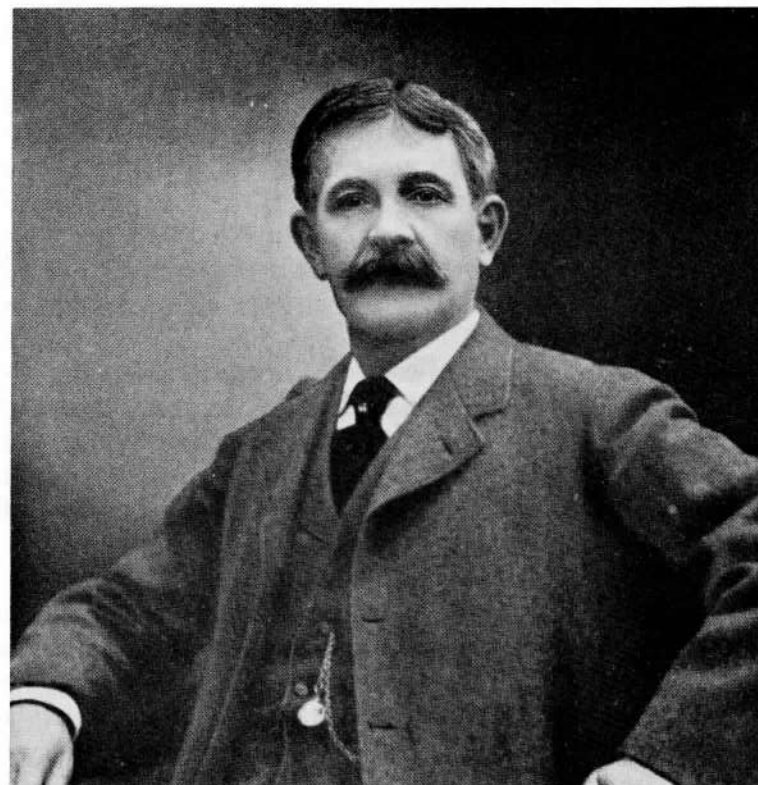
The story of that attempt to reach the North Pole is a compelling one, one ignored by Island historians. It is time it was told.

EDWIN A. COFFIN Jr., (1850-1917), a sixth-generation Vineyarder, was descended from John Coffin, the Island's first blacksmith, who came to Edgartown in 1682 from Nantucket. Edwin's father, a whaling captain, signed his son on as cabin boy aboard the Edgartown whaler *Champion*, family tradition tells us, with hope of discouraging him from becoming a mariner. At first, the plan seemed to be working. When the *Champion* stopped at Honolulu, the teenager asked to be sent home, unhappy as he was with life aboard a whaler. But the ocean was in his blood.<sup>1</sup> After two years ashore learning to be a machinist, he went back to sea and spent the rest of his working life aboard ship, mostly in Arctic waters where he learned a lot about ice floes.

That's what brought him to the attention of William Ziegler of New York.

Ziegler was a very wealthy man. In 1870, with two other men and \$60,000 capital, he founded the Royal Baking Powder Company at a time when every kitchen in America needed baking powder as much as kitchens need paper towels today. In 1881, Royal's profits were so high it paid 100 percent dividend on the 1600 shares owned by Ziegler and his partners. In 1888, after a bitter fight with his partners over control, he sold his interest for \$4,000,000. That was a lot of

<sup>1</sup> Not only was his father a whaling captain, three of his uncles were also whalemens. It was in the family!



*William Ziegler, baking-powder king, looked like the turn-of-the-century millionaire that he was, with his gold watch chain and walrus moustache.*

money in 1888: a male school teacher in Massachusetts earned \$800 a year and a female only \$300.

Ziegler, then 45, was too young, and ambitious, to retire. He bought two small baking-powder companies, merged them and was soon known as the country's baking-powder king. But that wasn't enough for him. He wanted to be famous for more than baking powder and the North Pole, as yet undiscovered, seemed to offer a way.

In 1900, when the polar idea began to consume him, the globe had been almost totally "discovered." There wasn't much left. Or so it was thought. The two places that piqued public curiosity most were the poles, North and South. What was there? The North Pole, being closer, was more tantalizing

to Americans and Europeans. For 25 years, adventurers had been trying to get there. Ten expeditions had set out -- all failed. None had come close.

William Ziegler was sure that the North Pole was his way into history. And he took the challenge seriously, financing it by devoting "a larger sum to the cause of arctic exploration than any other man in the world."<sup>2</sup>

That huge sum was spent on two unsuccessful attempts to plant the American flag at the top of the planet, at 90 degrees North Latitude. His first attempt was the Baldwin-Ziegler expedition of 1901-1902.

For this effort, Ziegler bought a steam whaler, the *Es-kimo*, famous in Arctic lore as the first ship each spring to reach Upernavik, Greenland, the most northern port in the world. She was renamed *America*, her hull was stiffened for ice breaking, her machinery upgraded. It was said he invested more than \$300,000 in the expedition.<sup>3</sup> To head the expedition, he chose a man named Evelyn B. Baldwin. Captain Johansen, a Norwegian, was hired as master of the *America*. In the fall of 1901, the steamer carried the expedition to Franz Josef Land, a Russian archipelago, the most northern on the planet. From a base camp there, in the following spring, a sledge party was to set off on a "dash for the North Pole," just over 500 miles away.

But the "dash" never took place, despite the fact that "no explorer had sailed under more favourable or promising conditions."<sup>4</sup> The expedition returned home in the summer of 1902 for reasons never made public. Some believe it was over "differences between Baldwin and his sailing master, Johansen." It was publicly stated only that "all relations between [Baldwin] and Ziegler were off."<sup>5</sup>

But that failure didn't faze Ziegler. That same year, he

put up another \$350,000 for a second attempt. He knew he must hurry. Robert Peary, the American naval officer, who had also failed in his first effort, was readying his second. The country watched the "race" as though it was a sporting contest. The press headlined each development. Which team would get to the North Pole first, Ziegler's or Peary's? Ziegler was determined it would be his.

On his second expedition, Ziegler decided to hire American whalers, men familiar with the polar ice north of the Arctic Circle. The *America*, now at a port in northern Norway, would again steam to Franz Josef Land with its adventurers and "scientists." The scientists were along to map any new discoveries and to record such phenomena as magnetic fluctuations, tidal flows, weather and the stars. These observations, though important, were only incidental to the basic goal: to plant an American flag on the North Pole. And to make a place in history for baking-powder king William Ziegler.

After the Baldwin expedition failed, Ziegler had questioned some of its members. Among those interviewed was a handsome young man, Anthony Fiala, the expedition's photographer. Ziegler asked Fiala, then 32, what he had done in the Arctic. Fiala responded: "I took thousands of photographs. And I have them here for you."

Pleased with this photographic record, the only tangible return on his investment, Ziegler in December 1902 made Fiala the commander of the second attempt. He was, no doubt, helped in this decision by William S. Champ, his secretary. Champ, a former sales executive in the Royal Baking Powder Company, had backed Ziegler in the struggle over control. When Ziegler sold his interest, he appointed Champ his private secretary and adviser. During the purchase and merger of the two other companies, Champ played a decisive role. Ziegler had complete confidence in him and put him in charge of the polar effort.

Champ went to New Bedford in January 1903 to hire a whaling captain experienced in Arctic waters. He picked Capt. Edwin Coffin Jr., of Edgartown. Fiala, whose book is the only published narrative of the expedition, makes it sound as

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times* May 25, 1905, in William Ziegler's obituary.

<sup>3</sup> As an indication of how much money Ziegler was spending, consider that in 1898 the assessed valuation of all real estate in Edgartown totaled \$590,000.

<sup>4</sup> William Champ's introduction to *Fighting the Polar Ice* by Anthony Fiala, Doubleday, Page & Co., N.Y., 1906, p. ix. Cited hereafter as Fiala.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, May 25, 1905. The bad feelings continued. In 1904 when Ziegler was indicted for bribery of state officials, he claimed Baldwin had instigated the action. Ziegler was never tried on the charge.

though he was the one who chose Coffin. But Coffin never mentions Fiala as being involved in his hiring. No newspaper story about the selection of *America's* captain and crew mentions Anthony Fiala. Yet, Fiala describes it this way:

... the party should be all American was the desire of ... Mr. Ziegler and myself, but it was not until nearly all the supplies were arranged for and the entire equipment ordered that we succeeded in finding a native American, Captain Edwin Coffin of Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, Mass., to navigate the expedition ship.<sup>6</sup>

Coffin, when asked by a *New Bedford Standard* reporter why he was the man chosen to captain the ship, replied:

"It all comes from having friends," and that is all he would say. ... [other sources told the reporter that] Mr. Ziegler wanted an experienced Arctic whaler and he [Ziegler?] came here looking for one with lots of ice experience. He talked with local authorities and they concluded that Captain Coffin was the man. Few local men have had as much hard ice navigation and few are as daring.

This New Bedford account states that Ziegler was in the city and was the one who hired Coffin. Whether it was Ziegler, Champ or Fiala is unclear. But whoever it was, Coffin was picked and immediately went to New York to discuss the expedition's plans with Ziegler. The *Vineyard Gazette* had an insider's account, thanks to Mrs. Coffin, but it says nothing about any attempt to discover the North Pole:

Capt. Edwin Coffin is still absent on a New York trip, but by advices received early in the present week by Mrs. Coffin we learn that he has engaged his services, at a very handsome compensation, as sailing master of a steamer which leaves a port in Norway in the spring on an exploring expedition to the far North.<sup>7</sup>

Coffin insisted at his hiring that it must be his responsibility to select the steamer's officers and crew. Or so he told the press:

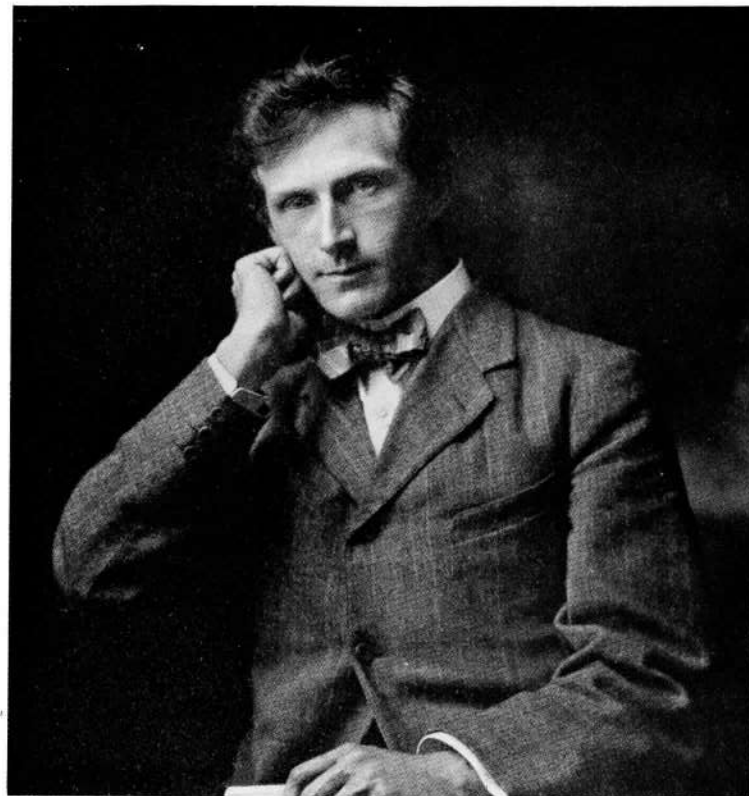
One thing I shall insist on, and that is that I shall pick my men. I shall have every man on board a Yankee and I shall pick them from among the most experienced ice sailors of this area. I ... want men who have experience in the ice as well as knowing a thing or two about getting into tight places and out again. It will be an experienced crew I take with me for Norway when I start for the ship in March.<sup>8</sup>

He also insisted that he would be hired as the ship's

<sup>6</sup> Fiala, pp. 10-11. He describes Coffin's job as "to navigate the expedition ship" not to "command" it. Coffin saw it differently, as we shall see.

<sup>7</sup> *Vineyard Gazette*, Jan. 15, 1903. The "very handsome compensation" was \$150 a month.

<sup>8</sup> *New Bedford Evening Standard*, Jan. 29, 1903.



Anthony Fiala, commander of the expedition, was never Coffin's friend.

master under United States Maritime Regulations, not "sailing master," like the previous skipper, or "navigator," as Fiala calls him in his book. He would be the ship's master, responsible for everything that went on aboard her. He wasn't seeking fame. It was just another Arctic voyage to him. Nor was he going to hire adventurers as crew. He wanted sailors who worked for money not fame. Getting to the pole would require such men, not adventurers or even scientists:

I told Mr. Ziegler that if the Pole was ever reached, it would be by men who were out on a business proposition. Of course, we ought to have scientific men along, but I guess if any one can reach the Pole it will be the men who are willing to push further north than any one else has ever done for a few dollars' worth of whalebone. Every man in this crew looks on the trip as a matter of business and will expect just as much hardship



and more than he has ever had whaling. They are there not for glory, but for what they are going to get out of it if they find the Pole. Mr. Ziegler has been liberal so far and if these men are willing to risk their lives whaling, I rather think they will go the limit for what he promises them. Besides, they're getting a good thing anyway. Of course, if there's any glory to go with it, I suppose they'll take what comes their way.

At the time, newspapers were reporting that Ziegler tried to hire a second Vineyarder, Capt. George Fred Tilton of Chilmark, to lead the "dash" to the pole. Like his friend Edwin, Captain Tilton was not seeking adventure or glory. He had gotten enough of both in 1897 when he made a five-month trek across the ice and snow from Point Barrow, Alaska, to Seattle, carrying news of the desperate plight of the whaling fleet iced in there. The trip made him a celebrity. He didn't need more fame; all it would take to sign him up was money:

Edgartown Whalers to Seek the Pole,  
Capts. Coffin and Tilton Are Wanted by Ziegler  
To Head His Expedition.

Mr. Ziegler has made an effort to get George Fred Tilton, another Martha's Vineyard whaler, to command [the expedition]. Mr. Tilton is now at his home in Chilmark and he says, "I told 'em, d'ya see, that I had been 12 years building up my position in my business, and that I did in '97 [1897] all the Arctic work I wanted for glory. I'm going this year as mate of the steam whaler *Belvedere* from San Francisco, and next year as master. If they want me to give up that, they can make it worth my while and I'll say this, when we've gone as far as we can, whether we get to 90 degrees or not, I'll go one mile farther than anybody else. . . I'm waiting to hear from them."<sup>9</sup>

He waited in vain to hear from Mr. Ziegler. No word came; George Fred Tilton wasn't hired. And William Ziegler usually got what he wanted.

When Captain Coffin returned to New Bedford to select his crew, he discovered it wouldn't be easy. It was late in the season. Most of the experienced whalers had already signed on other voyages:

This was not easy as many had agreed to go on their regular whaling voyages and the short time left before starting for Norway handicapped me considerable. [But by] March 1st, 1903, I had made agreements with 1st Officer, 2nd Officer, Steward, Cook, Mess Boy & 11 Seamen. Nearly all

<sup>9</sup> *Boston Sunday Globe*, Feb. 14, 1903. This was pure speculation. Fiala had already been hired as commander.

hailing from Mass.<sup>10</sup>

Coffin, like Tilton, had also signed on another voyage. As he had for several years, he was to serve as First Officer on the steamer *Corwin*, carrying passengers and freight between Seattle and Nome, Alaska, starting in the spring. But he had been released from his commitment, encouraged no doubt by the "very handsome compensation" from Ziegler. Although Coffin doesn't say so, Ziegler seems to have promised hefty bonuses if the pole was reached.

The *America's* engine-room crew, which would serve under Coffin, was already in place. Chief Engineer Henry P. Hartt from Virginia, who had been on the 1901 Baldwin expedition, was in Norway readying the steamer, Coffin was told. With him were two firemen and a carpenter, all Norwegians.<sup>11</sup>

With his crew lined up, Coffin returned to Edgartown to prepare for his long absence. He had only a few days. Early on the morning of March 7th, along with Mrs. Coffin and daughter Louise, he boarded the steamer *Uncatena* for New Bedford.<sup>12</sup> Many friends and relatives were on the wharf in Edgartown to wish him success. Captain Coffin was not a large man, but he stood tall as he walked up the gangplank with his old sextant under his arm. When the *Uncatena* arrived in New Bedford, newspapermen were waiting, eager to question the 50-year-old skipper. But he was under orders from Mr. Ziegler to say nothing. The negative stories after the failed Baldwin expedition had taught Ziegler a lesson, Coffin explained to the *Boston Globe*. Too many members had talked:

That's what's been the trouble before. There's been so much newspaper talk, and so much "I," "I," "I," that it's been agreed now that only one statement will be made before we start.

But he didn't mind talking about the old sextant he was carrying:

This old sextant has stood by me in catching whales and I guess it's good

<sup>10</sup> Coffin was exaggerating a bit. Only 14 of the 25 total crewmen were from Massachusetts, but most of those he hired were.

<sup>11</sup> One of the Norwegians, Havlik Augusturn, 38, became Coffin's favorite. Hardworking and dependable, he was given raise in pay to \$40 a month by the captain.

<sup>12</sup> The Coffins had five children, Carrie Louise being the second. Their oldest was Irving, then Mildred (who married the well-known Chilmark storekeeper, E. Elliot Mayhew), Edna and Edwin, the youngest being born in 1896.

enough for me now. At any rate, I prefer it.

Also waiting on the New Bedford pier was Second Officer Walter E. Hoxsie of New Bedford, a veteran of 13 seasons in the Arctic. After a brief conversation with Coffin, Hoxsie left, presumably (one reporter wrote) to carry out the captain's orders. The Coffin family then went to New Bedford's famed Parker House for lunch, after which the captain boarded a train for Boston to say goodbye to his 97-year-old mother.<sup>13</sup>

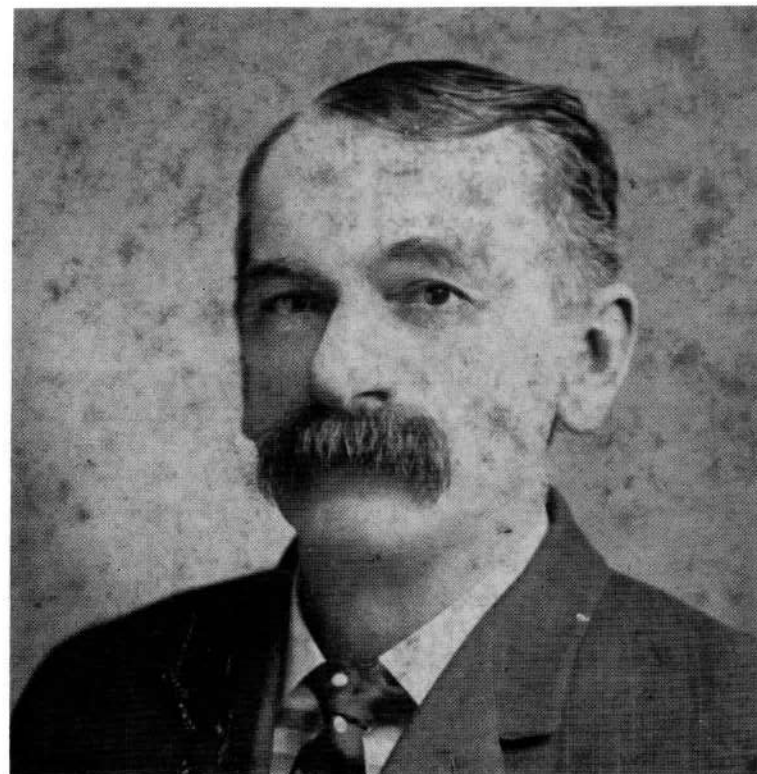
The goodbye visit with his mother over, Coffin took the train to Fall River where he joined his family and crew aboard the night steamer for New York City, arriving there in the morning. It had been a tiring 24 hours -- from Edgartown to New York by way of New Bedford, Boston and Fall River. But there was no time to relax. Coffin had meetings with Ziegler and last-minute supplies to pick up. Nor was there time for him to enjoy their luxurious accommodations at the Astor House, just off Times Square, then one of the city's finest. It was Mr. Zeigler's treat. Even the crew was staying in style, Coffin wrote:

The seamen were lodged at a good hotel on Broadway instead of the regular sailors' boarding house.

All were treated well by Ziegler. It was a heady time. Most of the sailors were in their early twenties, accustomed to the rough life of the foc'sle.

On March 10th, Captain Coffin said goodbye to his wife and daughter on the Hudson River pier and boarded the liner *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosser* for Germany. It had been another long day, one that had started on a sour note. First Mate Haven had let him down. His family was not able to board the ocean liner, no doubt the first one they had seen:

... he well knew 'twas his duty to bring the crew down to the steamer which we were to leave on. I had my wife and daughter [with me] and after waiting long as possible, went to the men's hotel and started them off and went back on a [street] car to the Astor House, took my wife and daughter in a coupe and drove to the steamer. ... 'twas too late for them to go on board with me, just time left to get my luggage and the men's on board. All we had planned at the dock fell through. This was Fiala's fault.<sup>14</sup> Still, I should have ordered the Mate whose duties commenced



*Capt. Edwin A. Coffin Jr., (1860-1917), master of the steam yacht America, served nine years as an Edgartown selectman after retiring from a life at sea.*

that day to have those men down at my stated time. Wages commenced that date, March 10th, [in ]consequence, I had to take a first mate's place and do his duties.<sup>15</sup>

Something else happened in those last few days that was never explained. Walter Hoxsie, the New Bedford whaler who had been Coffin's choice as Second Mate, was replaced by Joseph W. Nichols, also from New Bedford. Neither Coffin nor Fiala mentions this last-minute change. Even the newspapers were not aware of it.<sup>16</sup> Nichols turned out to be a poor choice, as we shall see.

The trans-Atlantic crossing was a smooth one, at least for the whalers on board. When he landed in Germany,

<sup>13</sup> It really was goodbye. His mother died while he was on Franz Josef Land.

<sup>14</sup> Fiala must have given incorrect instructions in his General Order.

<sup>15</sup> From his notebook labeled "Elmwood" and hereafter so cited, p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> The *Boston Sunday Journal*, March 22, two weeks later, still listed Hoxsie as Second Mate.



Coffin wrote to the editor of the *Gazette*, describing the trip: The only way I could tell I was on the ocean was by the engine vibrations. But some of the passengers were seasick. First Officer Haven remarked: "Anybody ought to be ashamed to be seasick on such a trip as this."<sup>17</sup>

On the next leg of their trip, Coffin knew they were on the ocean:

At Hamburg we had to wait four days for a steamer to Norway, the *Olaf Kyree*, a small freight and passenger boat. The first night out showed us the difference between the big liner, by her rolling propensities. One of the boys declared she rolled over twice during the night! I noticed we were the only passengers at the breakfast table. (*Elmwood*)

When the party landed at Tromso, Norway, on March 28th, Captain Coffin, for the first time, saw the steamer he was to command. He was not impressed. Ziegler had led him to believe that she was in first-class condition, ready to steam to Franz Josef Land. That was not the case, Coffin discovered: I found everything above the rail looking like a wreck & hull in need of repairs. Main deck and between decks to be renewed. Also some leaks to be located and stopped. The next day 1st Officer Haven commenced to clean up and get ship in readiness for the workmen to tear down and rebuild. (*Elmwood*)

Expedition Commander Fiala, had not accompanied them to Norway, leaving New York two days later, going to Norway by way of England, Germany and Denmark. He explained his action, stating he had supplies to purchase in those countries. But he didn't spend much time shopping; he arrived in Tromso March 31st, three days after the others.

Fiala, it seems, preferred to be on his own; he was not comfortable in the company of the others. He saw his role as commander like that of a general in the army, although his army had only 38 men. His method of communicating was by General Orders, army style.<sup>18</sup> A printing press for publishing such orders was among the equipment jammed aboard the *America*. Russell Porter, First Assistant Scientist and Artist, was the expedition printer. When the *America* reached the winter camp site September 6, 1903, Fiala was up to General Order No. 15. He had started publishing them in New York.

<sup>17</sup> *Vineyard Gazette*, April 16, 1903.

<sup>18</sup> His entry in *Who Was Who*, vol. III, has 12 lines devoted to his military career, most of it in the National Guard. He did serve on active duty in the Spanish-American War in the N. Y. Cavalry and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Fiala and Coffin were never close, not even friendly. They were so different in background and in style. Coffin, a 50-year-old Yankee, had lived a hard life at sea. He had worked his way up to a command position and, no doubt, saw the 34-year-old Fiala as an opportunist, someone whose experience had not earned him his place as commander.<sup>19</sup> At one point in his journal, Coffin bemoans the lack of discipline among the expedition members and remarks how different things would be had Ziegler hired Captain Tilton instead of Fiala. Coffin and Fiala, the two leading men in the drama, were always at arm's-length. We have no record of the two sitting together to talk about anything. Neither of them has anything good to say about the other. The almost total absence of praise for Coffin's role in the expedition in Fiala's lengthy book indicates a failure to empathize. During the long and frustrating voyage north through the ice fields, Coffin came to view Fiala as someone who thought he knew more about running the ship than he did.<sup>20</sup>

Under maritime law, Coffin, was in command while they were aboard his ship. He wanted that understood. The officers and crew, chosen hurriedly in the States, had not signed the maritime papers so the first thing Coffin did in Norway was to take them to an American Consulate and have them legally signed up under U. S. law. He was a master mariner, proud of his license and his reputation as captain. He, not Fiala, would give the orders while aboard ship.

But Fiala seemed to ignore such protocol. Perhaps he was unaware of it; he had never "gone to sea." It must be added, in fairness, that the distinction was a fine one. Fiala was expedition commander and, like Coffin, was proud of his title. But, Coffin believed, Fiala had no say in how he ran the steamer. Yet, at Tromso, Fiala began telling Coffin what he should do to the ship. The captain resented this and more

<sup>19</sup> Fiala never seemed to have a real occupation, except as an adventurer. He was on Col. Theodore Roosevelt's trip into the Brazilian wilderness in 1913-14, for example. His club listings include the Explorers, the Arctic, the Ends of the Earth, Camp Fire of America, American Canoe Association, Royal Geographic Soc., National Geographic Soc., Cruising Club of America and the Masons. He was an Episcopal vestryman and very religious.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, Coffin admitted that he did not ask either of his officers for advice on navigating the ship. Both he and Fiala were egocentrics.

than a year later, during the winter of 1904-5 while stranded on Franz Josef Land, he wrote a series of questions to ask Ziegler when he got back to New York. Heading the list was:

Firstly, I wish to know if it was his [Ziegler's] wish for the Leader Fiala to come out to Norway to make alterations on the *Stmr* [steamer]. And did he wish him to make a price on coal (which he did). A few Kroner more a ton would have given the same coal, all in lumps. (*Elmwood*, p.38.)

Coffin never had a chance to ask Ziegler the questions. The baking-powder king died the following spring, not knowing what had happened to his North Pole quest or whether his name would go down in history.

At Tromso, Coffin met his Chief Engineer Hartt and the three Norwegians. Also there was Pierre LeRoyer, a French-Canadian, who like Hartt, had been on the Baldwin-Ziegler expedition. After that expedition failed, LeRoyer was paid to remain as caretaker of the *America* at Tromso. Although listed in Fiala's table of organization as merely "Assistant in care of dogs," he was much more than that. LeRoyer held a privileged position. He alone among them was a long-time friend of Mr. Ziegler's, having been his guide on many hunting and fishing trips in Canada. It was clear that he was more than an assistant in care of dogs.

After instructing Coffin what to do with the steamer, Commander Fiala left Tromso. On April 27th, he was back in New York, his arrival being reported in the daily Shipping News of the newspapers. He had a few things to say to the reporters about the North Pole quest, based, it would seem, on hope rather than knowledge. He had been nowhere near any polar ice, but he seemed certain of its condition:

Anthony Fiala . . . was a passenger on the American Line steamship *St. Paul* . . . from Southampton. Mr. Fiala went abroad about a month ago . . . he now returns to consult with Mr. Wm. Ziegler.

. . . [Fiala said] the ice broke up early and the prospects for the expedition are good. . . the *America* will sail as soon as she is ready. She is being cleaned, new decks are being put in and other repairs made. . . she would go to Franz Josef Land and make a landing as far north as possible.<sup>21</sup>

Also in the States were the various members of the expedition's Field Department, which Coffin was usually disparaging of in his journals, often calling them "the scientists."

<sup>21</sup> *New York American*, reprinted in *Vineyard Gazette*, April 30, 1903.

Fiala's two divisions in his Table of Organization, the Field Department and the Deck Department, were, like Coffin and Fiala, never very close. Even during two long winters in the same camp, they ate food prepared in separate kitchens and served in adjacent huts. Only occasionally did they socialize and then, only a few of them. In total, there were only 39 men, but they seemed more competitive than cooperative, despite their shared dangers and hardships. Many of the 14 in the Field Department were caretakers of sorts: doctors to care for the men; veterinarians to care for the animals; and quartermasters and a commissary officer to care for the equipment and supplies. A number of them had been with Fiala on the previous Baldwin expedition:

. . . many of the American members of the last expedition [wished] to go north again. Where possible, preference was given to them, for having lived and laboured with them through the trials of an Arctic voyage, I knew them as I could not know others.<sup>22</sup>

Despite Coffin's disparaging title, only three could be called scientists and their responsibilities were not high science. They recorded weather data, tidal and magnetic fluctuations and studied the heavens. Chief Scientist was William J. Peters of the National Geographic Society, whom Fiala made his second in command overall. First Assistant Scientist and Artist was Russell W. Porter of Vermont whose scientific credentials are unknown. He, as mentioned earlier, was the expedition printer, putting out an occasional newsletter during the first winter. On Christmas and New Year of that winter, he printed up banquet menus. In addition, of course, he published Fiala's General Orders, which became infrequent as the months passed. Porter, an artist, also made sketches of the scenery, some of which are printed in Fiala's book.

Chief Weather Observer Francis Long was responsible for recording the temperatures and tides. He was on leave from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, which controlled the Federal Weather Bureau.

Caretakers included two medical doctors, one a surgeon from Maine and his assistant, a doctor from Indiana. Also in the Field Department was a medical student from New

<sup>22</sup> Fiala, p.11.

Jersey, listed by Fiala as "Second Assistant Surgeon in charge of the dogs." Mr. Ziegler's hunting guide was his helper. The expedition's veterinarian, H. H. Newcomb of Milford, Massachusetts, had an assistant "In charge of the ponies," a sergeant on leave from the United States Army Cavalry. Others in the Field Department were the Quartermaster and his assistant, plus a Commissary officer and his assistant.<sup>23</sup>

Coffin's responsibility was the "Deck Department" in Fiala's organization chart. There were 24 in it: the ship's officers, seamen, firemen, stewards, a cook and a cabin boy.

From the two departments, Fiala said he would select who would make the "dash" to the North Pole. Surprisingly, this critical group, vital to the expedition's success, had not been picked or trained earlier. From 38 men, all chosen for reasons unrelated to the physical challenge of trekking 1000 miles across the polar ice, Fiala would pick his team shortly before the "dash to the pole" began.

Fiala, who must have enjoyed traveling (no doubt, in First Class), was in New York only two weeks this time. On May 12th, he left for England, where on arrival a newspaper reported that he would remain in London and "await further word from William Ziegler." What these last-minute messages were, if any, Fiala doesn't mention in his book. He did disclose to the London newspaperman, however, his plan for reaching the North Pole, something he hadn't revealed to the members of the expedition:

Fiala has made his plans for the dash to the Pole with mathematical precision. The top of Franz Josef Land is 702 miles from the pole.<sup>24</sup> He can carry supplies for 140 days so to make the round trip the teams must average 10 miles a day. The best that polar teams have been able to make to date is only 8 miles a day. He is confident his team will do better. Going with him on the final dash will be Francis Long, who had been with Greeley (as a sergeant in the army) and was with Baldwin in the previous Ziegler expedition. Long was born in Germany and is now with the U. S. Weather Bureau of the Department of Agriculture.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The scientific results of the expedition were published by the National Geographic Society, financed by the Estate of William Ziegler, Editor John A. Fleming, 1907. Its title: *The Ziegler Polar Expedition 1903-1905*.

<sup>24</sup> It actually is only 525 miles from the North Pole.

<sup>25</sup> *Vineyard Gazette*, May 21, 1903. Greeley and Baldwin were earlier polar expeditions, both based at Franz Josef Land. On the Greeley expedition two-thirds of the men died of starvation.



From top and left, 1st Officer Edward Haven, Chief Scientist William J Peters, Capt. Edwin Coffin (center), Commander Anthony Fiala, and (bottom) Chief Engineer Henry Hartt. Photo taken before steamer left Trondhjem, Norway.

Why Long, the weather observer, was singled out by Fiala is unclear. Fiala said on other occasions that he would not choose the men to make that climactic dash until after they had spent the winter in camp so he could determine the most fit. Long was a personal friend of Fiala's, who in his book calls him "good, faithful Francis Long."

While Fiala was making news on both sides of the Atlantic, Captain Coffin was struggling to get the *America* ready to carry him and his expedition north. Much had to be done. Coffin took her to Trondhjem, far down the Norwegian coast, where there was the closest drydock large enough to handle her. There, she was "sheathed with green heart oak to within a few feet of her keel. . . . [her] bow was [already] steel clad and very solid. . . she was a very comfortable steamer, fitted with electric lights and all conveniences."<sup>26</sup>

Tons of provisions, for humans and animals, kept pouring in and had to be stacked aboard ship. Space was at a premium. In addition to the supply storage, there had to be

<sup>26</sup> *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, undated, quoting Coffin after his return from the north.



space for 39 men below deck and for animals on deck. A stable was built on deck amidships for the 30 ponies they would pick up. The lumber used would be re-used to build a house at the base camp. Bales of hay for the ponies were stacked on deck. An uncovered enclosure on top of the stable would confine the more than 200 dogs they would take with them.

Coal, 600 tons of it, was loaded in the bunkers. It must have been a logistical nightmare for the quartermaster to stock all the necessities. Once the *America* left the continent, for 30 months all would depend for survival on what was on board. It was hoped to have reached the pole in half that time, but a safety factor was built into the planning.

The ship was almost ready when Fiala returned from New York. But, once again, he left. This time, for Russia:

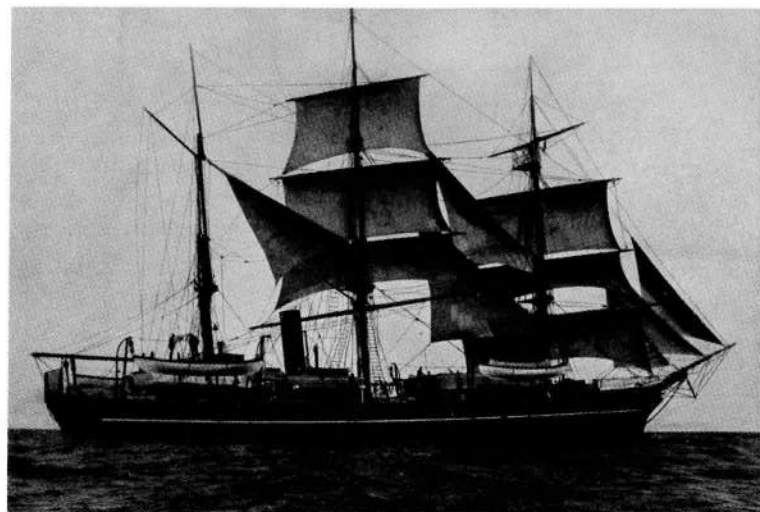
On arrival at Trondhjem, I found that the repairs on the ship were almost completed and she was moved to a dock to receive her coal and stores. Leaving the *America* again, I hurried by rail across Norway and Sweden to Stockholm and from there by steamer to St. Petersburg, and then by the slow-moving Russian railroad made my way to Archangel to inspect the furs that had been ordered. . . . On return to Trondhjem I found the storehouses and dock filled with cases, bales, barrels and bags. The great shipment of stores from six countries had arrived. . . . The *America's* appearance now offered a pleasing contrast to the last view I had had of her. With rigging taut, spars cleaned and painted, and a new smokestack, I hardly recognized the old ship.<sup>27</sup>

Early in June, the band of "scientists" arrived and on June 23rd all was ready. William S. Champ, the secretary of Mr. Ziegler, arrived from New York at 6 p.m., and once he was aboard, the *America* steamed out of the harbor for Trono where she would pick up the animals left there by the Baldwin expedition. Once outside the harbor, the *America* was met by a boat carrying 11 packages of gun cotton that Fiala had ordered. Under local regulations, the explosives could not be put on board while the steamer was in port.<sup>28</sup>

Coffin's crew had developed friendships with local residents during the stay. The ship's departure brought out many who wished them success. Coffin describes the departure and, incidentally, hints at his feelings toward Mr. Champ:

<sup>27</sup> Fiala, p. 19. He does not credit Coffin with playing any part in the rehabilitation of the ship, mentioning only First Officer Haven as being in charge.

<sup>28</sup> These explosives became another area of conflict between Fiala and Coffin, as we shall see.



The steamer as she looked the first day out on her journey to Franz Josef Land. It was one of the few times she raised her sails to conserve coal (see text, p.24).

Rung up full speed, dipped our flag to the people on the docks who came to see us off. Thus bade *adieu* to our many friends in the pretty, hospitable city of Trondhjem, for I can truly say there was nothing but good wishes for our success. . . . The genial representative of William Ziegler was on board, W. S. Champ, to be with us until the last minute.<sup>29</sup>

On June 26th, they dropped anchor at Trono, a small island where they picked up five ponies from the previous expedition and 183 dogs, 25 of them young pups. Crossing the Arctic Circle, all on board who had not crossed it before were tossed overboard, in maritime tradition. The steamer did not stop for the ceremony and the initiates were secured by long lines and quickly hauled back after the frigid christening.

From Trono they went to the familiar port of Tromsø, where the *America* had spent the winter, and hurriedly took on more supplies. The next day they sailed for the Russian port of Arkhangel, far around the northern tip of Norway. There, 8 tons of oats and cracked corn for the ponies were put aboard, plus 25 more ponies and 30 dogs. Also picked up were the deerskins and furs Fiala had bought in Russia. These would

<sup>29</sup> This and several later quotations are from several loose sheets written by Coffin some time after the events occurred. He was apparently going to write the full story of the expedition, but never finished. It is undated and will be cited as "Coffin, loose sheets."

be made into clothing to be worn on the sledge journey to the pole.<sup>30</sup> While the ship was in Arkhangel, a Russian who had been on the Baldwin expedition begged to be allowed to join them. He would go without pay, he said, but had to be turned down. No room, was Fiala's reason.

At midnight July 4th, they left Arkhangel, steaming north to Vardo, the final port of call before heading for Franz Josef Land and, they all hoped, the North Pole. Almost immediately it was discovered that they had taken on more than dogs and ponies at Arkhangel:

We also had a stowaway who wished to go Pole hunting. An Englishman who ran away from some ship in the port. He was very anxious to stay, but he must go back to his ship was the verdict.<sup>31</sup>

Fortunately, they hadn't dropped off the Russian pilot and the disappointed adventurer was sent back with the pilot as the *America* headed out into Barent's Sea. It was the first encounter with heavy seas in her loaded condition. Captain Coffin discovered that the rough water meant a change would be needed in the dog "kennel" and he couldn't resist a note of sarcasm about the landlubber "scientists" on board:

'Tis blowing a moderate gale . . . had to slow down the engine on account of the dogs on the forecastle head, as they would get washed overboard. Just before slowing down, a sea came over and from the bridge I could see a confusion of all parts of dogs in the water. Their chains only kept them from being swept away. This kind of dog has little liking for water. . . I notice poor appetites are in order today among the Expedition party . . . [they] say they are not sick. 'Tis bad air from the engine room that ails them, although they do not notice it in smooth weather!

To veteran ocean sailor Coffin it may have been only a "moderate gale" but Fiala called it a "storm." He and Mr. Champ, along with others in the Field Department, were "under the weather." The Commander tried to make light of the matter, but it clearly was embarrassing:

Neither Mr. Champ nor I is subject to seasickness as a rule, but while the storm lasted we could do little but lie on our bunks and poke fun at each other when a respite from our distressed condition permitted

When the *America* steamed into the calm water of Vardo harbor, appetites improved and that evening, July 9th,

<sup>30</sup> It seems strange that something as important as the clothing to be worn would have to be sewed by the men themselves. There were no L. L. Bean logos or Nike swooshes on them, of course; these garments were strictly of local manufacture.

<sup>31</sup> Coffin, loose sheets.



The steamer's deck was far from shipshape as the improvised stable (lower) and dog kennel (upper) gave it the look of a shantytown. A dog and pony are visible.

the two men held a planning meeting aboard the steamer Mr. Champ would be leaving on:

I went aboard his steamer, and in the privacy of his cabin we talked over the affairs of the expedition and of the Relief Ship that he was to bring up in the summer of 1904. We agreed that Cape Flora, on Northbrook Island, would be the place of rendezvous . . . I was to send a party to Cape Flora early in the spring of 1904 with letters [to inform] Mr. Champ of our whereabouts and of the success or failure of the expedition. . . I told Mr. Champ that the *America* would start for Cape Flora just as soon as she could get free in the summer of 1904. . . Mr. Champ left at midnight. The Norwegian steamer, upon whose deck he stood, passed close to the *America* . . . the men of the expedition party cheered loudly.<sup>32</sup>

Arriving in Vardo, Coffin was pleased to find his bag of sea clothes waiting for him. It had mistakenly been taken off the steamer and moved to the expedition's warehouse in Tromsø. While at Arkhangel, Coffin telegraphed to have it shipped to Vardo. He picked up more than sea clothes. At Vardo, he met a Norwegian captain named Leith, who gave him some articles about previous polar expeditions:

At Vardo I met Captain Leith of a steamer . . . and I was much indebted to him for some numbers of the *Nautical Magazine* which had much

<sup>32</sup> Fiala, p. 24

criticism [sic] on Nansen's Pole Dash. Or I should say his positions as established by himself (Nansen). All were very interesting to me. . . Captain Leith took supper with us the night of our departure. He also gave my Chief Engineer a carrier Pidgeon (which had alighted on his steamer on the trip across).<sup>33</sup>

Captain Coffin describes the farewell salute given by the expedition members to the departing Mr. Champ, who, many months later, would come to their rescue:

We sent Mr. Champ off with the siren blowing one continuous blast as the valve got stuck. Quartermaster Rilliet was in the after rigging blowing the bugle. Mr. Fiala and I fired off two detonating missiles which rang in my ears for some time after. . . we took on 60 tons more coal and filled up all water tanks. . . all well and anxious to get started for the North Pole.<sup>34</sup>

On the evening of July 10th, the next day, the *America* steamed out of Vardo harbor and headed north. Aboard were 39 men, 30 ponies and more than 215 dogs, plus provisions for at least 30 months. She was heavily laden. The brisk wind from the southwest gave Coffin a welcome chance to conserve coal by hoisting the sails. This provided Fiala with a photo opportunity and he was rowed a short distance off in the ship's dinghy to record the scene (see p. 21).

As they headed north to Franz Josef Land, the ship's carpenter and seamen built a crow's nest high on the foremast. This lookout platform was wired for communication with the bridge and engine room by means of electric bells, thus doing away with shouting orders to the deck or using flag signals or whistles. The dogs howling all together would make it impossible to hear a whistle or hollering on deck from the crow's nest. . . Our 200 dogs all doing their Wolf howling, each one trying to outclass the others, can better be imagined than described.<sup>35</sup>

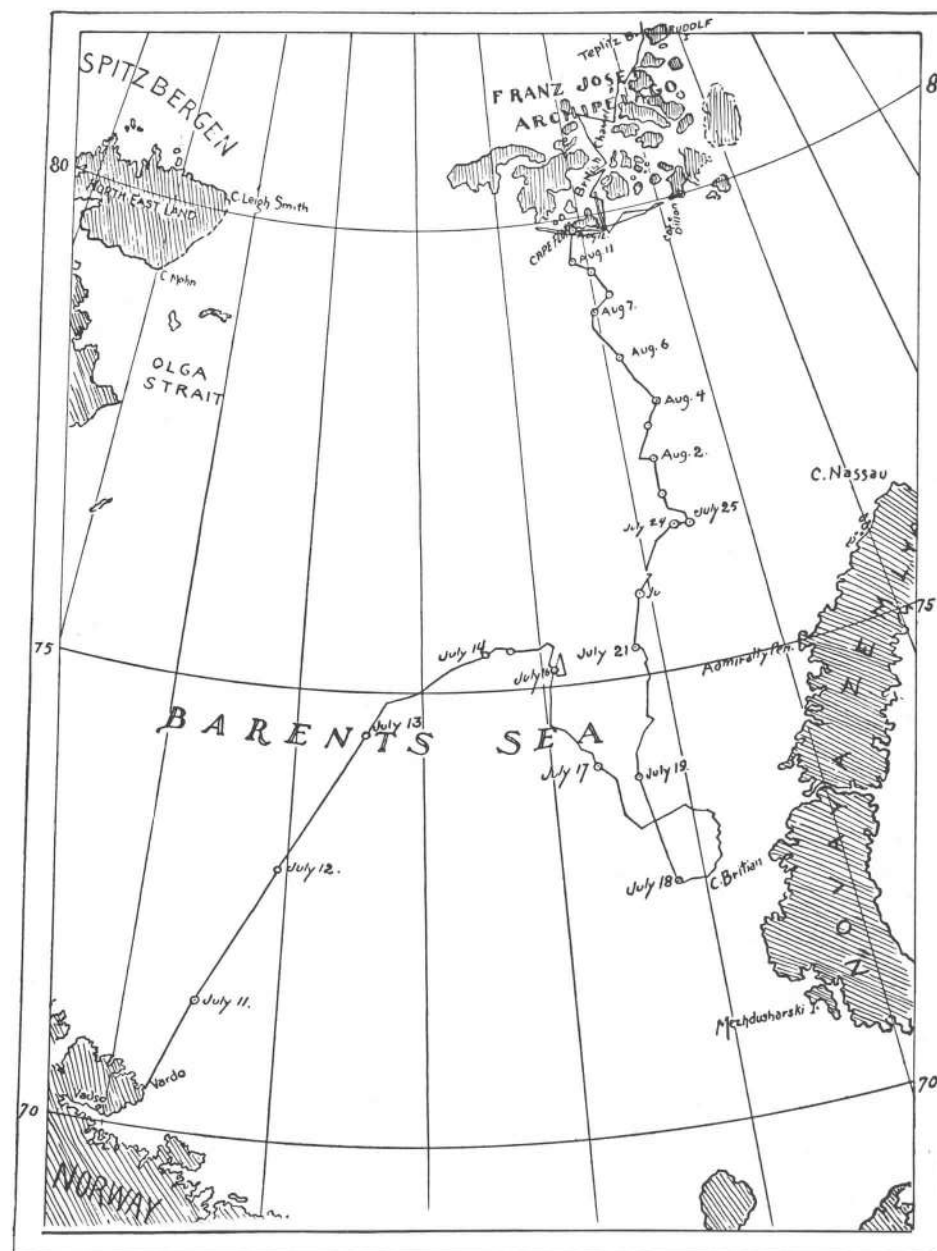
Three days out of Vardo, at 6 p.m., July 13th, they came up to solid field ice at 74 degrees 51 minutes North latitude, much farther south than expected. It was not a welcome sight for Captain Coffin. But the Field Department members were enthused. They were finally getting close to their goal, the North Pole:

The sight of the ice today was a welcome one to all the expedition folks, showing them that the real commencement of their pole seeking had ar-

<sup>33</sup> Coffin, loose sheets. The pigeon could have been a valuable means of communications, but it was not to be, as we shall see.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



Coffin's meandering course from Norway to Franz Josef Land. He met thick ice on July 13 at about 75 degrees North, headed east and south until July 18. On July 20, they gave a Norwegian sealer letters to send home. From then until August 11, Coffin pushed through narrow leads in the ice, finally arriving at Cape Flora in the Franz Josef archipelago on August 12. More ice blocked their passage north through the islands and it wasn't until August 31 that they arrived at their destination, Teplitz Bay.



rived. The majority had not seen pack ice [before]. It also showed by it being so far south 'twould be no easy obstacle to overcome, even with our good ship.<sup>36</sup>

The initial enthusiasm of the Field Department soon evaporated. For more than a week, Coffin steamed east and west, and sometimes south, looking for an opening in the solid ice. Briefly, he found an opening and for a while the *America* make progress, but not to the north, where they wanted to go: Found some loose ice and steamed in about 15 miles then coming up to solid ice was obliged to work out to east, making some south. Much heavy ice today. The ponies didn't seem to mind the ship hitting ice, only when the shock would throw them from their stalls on the deck. The sailors' quarters being forward where most of the shock comes got very little sleep and [they] were out on deck watching . . . They will soon get used to it . . . The dogs were taken from on top of the forecastle and put underneath . . . Never has been my fortune to see a more desolate scenery in my experience of 28 years in Arctic oceans. . . Patience is one of the most essential qualities needed in making a passage through ice . . . any ice-breaking steamer can only do about so much. The ship is still in good condition, making but little water and decreasing every day.

The long days (the sun was now above the horizon 24 hours a day) dragged on with little or no progress toward Franz Josef Land. The "expedition folks" were restive and began to question Coffin's ability. They huddled below the bridge and talked about him, not always discreetly:

Rather discouraging [Coffin wrote] having to work south when one wants to go north. This is one of the phases of icing which tries one's patience. One of the expedition party comes towards the bridge, glances up at the standard compass (overhead) says, "Why we are going South?" Confers with another and then remarks, "Guess we are going back to Norway for more coal." All in a hurry to get to Franz Josef Land.

As one would expect, those who knew nothing about navigating through Arctic ice were quickest to criticize. After nearly 30 years in Arctic waters, Coffin knew what he was doing and tried to ignore them. But their lack of respect bothered him. They wanted him to take any opening, however uncertain. Wasn't the *America* an ice-breaker? Why was he so timid? Even Fiala began to question him, as Coffin noted:

These parties were in a continual ferment about my not working the steamer to suit them. Some of them apparently worse than the others . . . my 1st officer informed me he had heard them talking from his room. As I

have found out since, the Leader Fiala did take stock in what these men said . . . my 2nd officer, who never rang a gong on a steamer before he came on the *America*, [was encouraging the talk]. . . The first I found out was in this way: on account of Fiala's continual saying, "Can't we go here?" and, "It looks as if she could work through here," until I was tired. . . [one day] to show him, I threw away a ton or two of coal. . . to get in a small narrow hole leading out into a field of ice. . . too thick for the *America* to buck through. . . I simply had to stop, as a heavy piece of ice was jammed under the propeller and to turn it was to break it. . . When I came down from the crow's nest to my room, Dr. Vaughn speaking to someone in the engine room, evidently Hartt, said "Dammit! Why don't Fiala go up in the crow's nest himself and take the ship away from the Captain?" When told there was no coal to throw away, he replied, "To hell with the coal. I had rather be at Franz Josef's Land with 10 tons than here with 300!" This was said before me. Afterwards I found out this was common talk, especially when in the engine room or between decks. Glory Hole, they named it.

After this episode I never paid much attention to anything Fiala said. . . I [write this] to show what kind of men were around me & what prospects were of any such men making a North Pole record!<sup>37</sup>

In his journals, Coffin tried to suggest that the criticism did not bother him. But it did -- then, and for a long time afterwards. Among the questions he would ask Mr. Ziegler, questions he wrote a year later while marooned in Franz Josef Land, was:

Did you ever give Mr. Fiala the idea that if I couldn't get the steamer through the ice, he would take the steamer under his charge & force her through?

More revealing of his thoughts about Fiala, was this:

When you gave Mr. F. the paper which was the same as a power of attorney [did you] want him to think he could at any time interfere in my duties as a First Class licensed Master or remove me or any other officer? He has many times told others that is why you gave him that paper. . . I fully supposed when you had the *America's* officers & crew put in officially under the Merchant Marine Articles that then you must trust in the honor of the bonafide Captain. . . Mr. Fiala expected to change the whole shipping articles which had been signed. This caused much trouble, so much that many of the expedition party would openly try to interfere (in their talk) with my handling the ship.

Coffin's unhappiness with Fiala kept building as they steamed back and forth, unable to find an opening in the barren, lifeless ice barrier. It was, Coffin had noted, "the most

<sup>37</sup> Elmwood, p. 53. Remember that these comments were written some months later so Coffin has the benefit of hindsight.

desolate scenery" he had viewed in 28 years of Arctic sailing. Then, on July 20th, ten frustrating days after leaving Vardo, they met a Norwegian schooner, a sealer:

I went on board of this vessel (Mr. Fiala accompanied me) to send letters home & to find out how far north the schooner had been able to get, west of where I had been. They reported a very icy season, also told my interpreter [the ship's carpenter, a Norwegian] that they did not believe any steamer could get to Franz Josef Land this year. . . . We made a short tarry on board and said goodbye, not knowing when we would see another sign of civilization. (Elmwood, p. 29)

Among the letters the Norwegians would mail for them was one from Coffin to his wife. When the letter arrived in Edgartown, Mrs. Coffin took it to the *Gazette* which printed it on September 23, 1903, two months after it was written. In it, Coffin wrote:

There is a vessel right ahead and I will send this by her to you. I came up to the ice the 14th and have been trying to find a lead in the ice ever since. Reached the shores of Nova Zembla last night . . . This is the farthest north I can get now without going into close ice. I am well and so are all hands, even the dogs. I am afraid we won't get through until quite late as it is a bad year for ice. I have just written a short letter to Mr. Ziegler. Everything works well on ship board and I find the *America* a fine sea boat.

Captain Coffin's "short letter" to Ziegler is not in our collection, but he did summarize it in the Elmwood booklet:

I sent a short report to Wm. Ziegler (the owner of this expedition) that there was plenty of ice and no leads of water that I could shove the steamer in . . . and [I] would work through the ice to destination & would make land in time.

A newspaper clipping in the *Vineyard Gazette* library, unidentified as to origin and date, quotes from a letter Fiala had written to Mr. Ziegler that same day:

Instead of being a particularly good year as to ice conditions, the indications thus far seem to prove otherwise. . . . Everything aboard has been pleasant and harmonious. Men are in splendid condition and happy, although impatient to get north. . . . we are particularly thankful for the coal we took on at Vardo as we shall need every ounce.<sup>38</sup>

The letters mailed by the Norwegian sealers were the last messages the world would receive from the Ziegler Polar Expedition for more than two years. The carrier pigeon which

<sup>38</sup> The author is most grateful to Eulalie Regan, *Gazette* librarian, for her help with this and many other articles he has written. The reference to the Vardo coal is clearly a message on behalf of Mr. Champ who must have authorized it while there with the expedition.

Captain Leith had given Chief Engineer Hartt would have provided a way to send a message later, but it was no longer with them:

[Hartt] kept it awhile in a small box. After making the ice, our expedition commissary [John Truden] made a larger one for the bird but Mr. Hartt took a notion to let the bird go around a bit, not thinking he would fly away. He hopped around a little while, then flew up in the air straight, circled around a few times, then came back and alighted on the Top Gallant yard a short time. He soon left and did the same circling & heading about due South went quickly out of sight on a straight line. 'Twas a thick fog at the time and the steamer was lying still among large pieces of ice. Sorry afterward as no message was secured on him.<sup>39</sup>

After talking with the Norwegian skipper, Coffin headed the *America* west, it being, he believed, the most likely area to find an opening north. But progress continued to be tedious. Openings quickly closed, forcing Coffin to shut down the engine and wait for the floes to shift. He began to believe the Norwegians: no steamer could make it to Franz Josef Land.

Ice was not the only obstacle. Fog was another. Often, when he found an opening (a "lead" it was called), dense fog soon moved in, forcing another stop. The skipper had to see far enough ahead so as not to get trapped and possibly crushed by shifting ice. On July 23rd, after three foggy days, visibility returned. Real progress was made. They steamed 25 miles north before the fog stopped them. This time, it soon cleared. At 11 p.m., the midnight sun shone through, but solid ice blocked their way north.

For the first time, they saw animal life. As the *America* sat stationary, two curious seals came alongside. It was a fatal mistake. Quickly, a few "scientists" got out rifles and shot them. Even Coffin, who opposed any unnecessary killing of animals, seemed pleased:

Ate them for supper & they were pronounced very good. Everybody feels in good humor today and feeling confident of getting through the ice . . . only a few days back it seemed to them uncertain. It only takes a little to have a rise and fall of the men's spirits in this dreary northern climate.

But the good humor didn't last. For two days, the *America* sat there, tied to the ice floe. Then another bit of excitement: the first polar bears came into view:

Two bears came trotting up to the steamer. The men saw them coming

<sup>39</sup> Coffin, loose sheets. Following quotes are also from them.

and got rifles enough to kill a score. I was eating dinner when they commenced shooting. One bear dropped at the first volley, after a while the other bear was hit but soon recovered and ran for a hole of water. The men were so excited they couldn't shoot straight. I don't think any of the boys were proud of their shooting today. About thirty odd shots fired.

The slow progress forced Coffin to conserve coal even more. Despite what Doctor Vaughn had said, having only 10 tons of coal when they set up camp would mean disaster. For survival through the winter they would need coal -- lots of it. Also, coal would be needed to get down to Cape Flora next year to meet the relief ship. And, in Coffin's cautious plans, there was a chance that the relief ship wouldn't make it, meaning he would need coal to return to Norway.

Water also had to be conserved. With 39 men and 250 animals on board, a lot of water was consumed. Their only re-supply was the fresh water in vast puddles on the ice surface as the sun melted the glacial ice. Only water from glacial ice was potable, ocean ice water was salty. Coffin had made 2nd Officer Nichols responsible for the water. Nichols soon gave the captain further reason to question his ability:

Once the [illegible adjective] 2nd Officer pumped brackish water in one of the After tanks, reserved for human use, causing the 1st Officer to pump all the water over the side. 'Twas nearly full. After this, I made sure the 1st Officer tasted the water or tried it myself before pumping it on board.

The *America* made little headway in the next three weeks. Shipboard impatience mounted. Coffin was "assisted" by what he called his "ice pilots," men in the Field Department, frustrated by delay, who climbed up the rigging, pointing out openings he should take. Having had two ships under his command crushed by ice, Coffin knew the destructive power of ice. The ship was his responsibility, not theirs, and he was cautious. Too cautious, the "ice pilots" thought. From the crow's nest, Coffin studied the ice in front of them through binoculars. He could see much farther than the impatient men below, who, like back-seat drivers, kept giving him unwanted advice. Fiala described their action:

Every halt of the ship was accepted with impatience by some of the company who, though it was their first experience on a Polar sea, freely gave their opinions as to how the ship should be managed. . . The Captain at

first thought it amusing and often asked me to look down over the edge of the crow's nest at his "ice pilots" strung in the rigging below . . . their eyes glued to the ice.<sup>40</sup>

Coffin had promised Mr. Ziegler he would deliver the expedition to 82 degrees north latitude. After weeks at sea, they were only at 75 degrees. Progress was painful and snail-like. He would jam the bow up on the ice until the ship's weight broke off a piece, then push forward until again stopped by ice. Over and over, he repeated the procedure. It was nerve-wracking. Butting into the ice shook the ship, making relaxing impossible. The strain began to affect Coffin, who began to trust only himself:

I was handicapped much by some members of the expedition who knew just how to do it and made it very disagreeable for me. This disturbance had been going on for some time before I was aware . . . Had I been following the wishes of these people I would [have] burnt up all my coal for a failure. There never was one moment that I didn't know what to do. Nor did I ever call in the aid of any of my officers . . . Neither of them had ever been on a steamer as officers before. Especially my 2nd Officer who did not even have a license. He knew more than I did always . . . I found his opinion would not help.<sup>41</sup>

Then on August 7th, Cape Flora, a tall headland on the western end of Northbrook Island, suddenly could be seen above the fog. It was their first landfall in the Franz Josef Archipelago. It was a glorious sight. Finally, land! The voyage had taken twice as long as expected, but they had made it. Captain Coffin was exuberant. He had proved the Norwegian sealer wrong! He had made it to Franz Josef Land. But not quite. Solid ice blocked them. Clearly visible, tantalizingly so, Cape Flora was still out of reach:

Was held fast in a small hole 4 days with Cape Flora bearing from N by E to N. N. W with considerable pressure on the ice which I always was able to keep clear of . . . in the 375 miles of icing, the steamer never got any hard squeezes. . . none that could be perceived by our party.

Impatiently, they stared at the cape. Finally, the wind shifted, a lead opened, and Coffin pushed into open water south of Northbrook Island, heading for Cape Flora. It was the first open water in weeks. Their spirits soared. But Cape Flora was not their destination. Teplitz Bay was. And that was 160

<sup>40</sup> Fiala, p. 30.

<sup>41</sup> This was Nichols, who had suddenly replaced Hoxsie in New York.



miles farther north. For the moment, however, spirits were high. They stopped briefly at Flora:

Stopped at Cape Flora long enough for Mr. Fiala to land a small cache of stores for a small party (say 3) coming down in the summer of 1904 (early).<sup>42</sup>

Along with the provisions, Fiala left a note, a progress report for the relief party that would, it was hoped, arrive late the following summer. Coffin placed a copy of Fiala's message in his notes much later:

The S. Y[acht] *America*, Expedition ship of the Ziegler Polar Expedition arrived off Cape Flora at the above date [August 12, 1903] after a long and trying passage through the ice of Barentz Sea. . . . The ice was in exceptionally large and unbroken fields and we were much troubled with fog. . . . We were in sight of Cape Flora four days and were working our way in narrow leads, and were obliged to use gun cotton mines to break a passage between immense floes of ice for the escape of our ship into open water.<sup>43</sup> All members of the expedition are in good health and the best of spirits prevail . . . we have lost by death eleven dogs, one pony. . . . We leave this place this date directing our course if possible via British Channel. Anthony Fiala, Commanding Expedition.

The British Channel (see map, back cover) was the major waterway leading north to Teplitz Bay, the planned winter camp site on Rudolph Island. Access to it was through one of several lesser channels, the widest being De Bruyne Sound. The Franz Josef Land archipelago, the land closest to the North Pole in this part of the world, has more than 80 volcanic islands, all barren and uninhabited. At this time, the land and waters were only superficially charted. Although several polar expeditions had used the islands as base camps, little charting had been done. A skipper was on his own most of the time. De Bruyne Sound led into British Channel which ran up to Victoria Sea and Rudolph Island, the most northern. Just north of Rudolph Island was the polar ice cap across which Fiala would take his sledge party to the North Pole.

Coffin headed the steamer east toward the entrance to De Bruyne Sound. Again, disappointment. De Bruyne was solid ice. Another route had to be found, as Coffin noted: Seeing no chance to do anything but wait the movement of the ice I

<sup>42</sup> Cape Flora was where Fiala and Champ had agreed to send the re-supply ship. The "small party" would meet it with information about the status of the polar quest at that time.

<sup>43</sup> To his copy of Fiala's message, Coffin added: "The mines were useless. E C"



*Thick ice forced the steamer to spend days waiting for a wind shift to open a lead to the north. Crow's nest, where Coffin spent hours, is seen high on foremast.*

steamed south out of the sound thence East & South hoping against hope for a chance to go north via Camp Ziegler (Alger Island). Mr. Fiala was very anxious to touch at Camp Ziegler. As every channel & sound was frozen that I had come to, I had very little faith in that route.

Camp Ziegler on Alger Island, which Fiala was anxious to visit, had been set up and named by the 1901 Baldwin-Ziegler expedition. The name was a trophy to Mr. Ziegler for paying the bills. A large island in the archipelago was named Ziegler Island.<sup>44</sup> When the Baldwin expedition abandoned its quest for the pole, a cache of supplies was left at Camp Ziegler. Fiala was anxious to see if it had survived. Little did he realize then how important that cache, and several others like it, would be to their survival.

Alger Island was solidly iced in and the *America* could not get close. Coffin headed back to Cape Flora. Again, the grumbling resumed. Even Fiala started telling Coffin how to navigate his ship. The captain was not pleased:

Got steam and steamed far west as possible (clear) could see the ice was on at Cape Murray. Came back & at Mr. Fiala's many requests I shoved the steamer (not in the hole he wanted me to, that closed tight inside two

<sup>44</sup> Names were bestowed in gratitude. A smaller island was named "Champ Island."

hours) in a long hole open to the south. I told Fiala that there was nothing gained [as] 'twas about 2 miles farther [this way]. We were liable to get closed up from the South & with the regular SE winds we had been having, the Steamer would get jammed over to the western side. [I would] have a job to get out. . . We would save coal by going up east as the ice was sure to clear off on the East side. . . This was the last time I ever listened to any one in regard to the movements of the steamer.

It was slow going. Coffin punched the *America* into the narrow leads most likely to take them north. Ice breaking consumed a lot of coal, but he had no choice. It was already mid-August and Teplitz Bay was still 80 miles away

During the laborious trip north, Coffin kept looking for safe harbors where the *America* could winter, protected from the destructive ice that is driven down from the north by gale winds. Any ship exposed to the ice was certain to be crushed. Coffin knew that from experience.

Time had become critical. The months when the sun never rises begin in October. It was almost September and they were not at their camp site. Once there, much had to be done to prepare for winter. On August 29th, they came to Jackson Island, still 40 miles south of Teplitz Bay, and again were fogbound. There, Coffin discovered a good harbor, one not shown on the chart. He liked it and even seemed to think it would be a desirable camp site:

August 29. Went in to Safety harbor<sup>45</sup> about 3 P.M. and tied up to the bay ice which is unbroken, looks as if it never broke up. 'Tis a fine harbor and a safe one. Also an excellent spot for erecting houses and a fine exercising ground. [In another place in his journals he wrote: "Found this island Frederick Jackson entirely wrong at this point from the chart. The Chart gives a round, big island at this place, with an island west of it. We find a fine sheltered harbor with plenty of water and muddy bottom for anchorage (small harbor). . . After supper I went on shore. On the south side is a gradual slope to the summit about 250 feet high. . . a fine location for a house and plenty of room to exercise dog teams or ponies clear of stones. . . I could see this was an ideal harbor for these islands. Having seen none at any other place far as I had been with the ship and I always had my eyes open for such a place in the event of not being able to reach Crown P. Land [Crown Prince Rudolph Island].

The fog lifted the next day and they resumed steaming north. At a New York meeting, Coffin had pointed out to Mr. Ziegler a small, protected island called Coburg on the chart

and told him it looked like the safest area to winter. Now he was only a few miles from it and he decided to look at it and see if there was any chance to find a good safe harbor. The Channel between C. [Coburg] Island and Carl Alexander Island, 3/4 miles, was all open. The first one I had seen and the only one open. I saw enough to convince me there was a good harbor between the island Coburg & another smaller unnamed one East of it & North. . . That was the nearest place to Teplitz Bay that I picked out in New York.

Coburg was protected from ice floes by a land mass to the north and west. It was likely to have open water around it in the spring so the ship could carry the sledges farther north to start the "dash to the pole."<sup>46</sup> His New York selection seemed a good one. Wintering there, the steamer would be only 15 miles south of Teplitz Bay, Fiala's choice to camp. Teplitz had been used by several expeditions, including the famous Duke of the Abruzzi party in 1899. That may have influenced Fiala's decision.

Coffin doesn't mention Fiala during his inspection of Coburg. Nor does Fiala mention Coburg in his book. He wrote at length about the day before on Jackson Island when he and two men climbed the glacier to look north to Teplitz. When they returned, he went to his cabin:

Felt very tired on return to ship for want of sleep. About ten o'clock in the morning, I turned in and slept soundly until 4:40. After supper, I climbed to the crow's nest and noticed that the ice had opened a little. Reported it to Capt. Coffin, and in a few minutes we were under way.

The bugle then sounded the time of Sunday service and while we were engaged in a devotional meeting, the shaking and pounding of the ship denoted our entrance into the ice. At the close of the service, we went on deck to find the *America* slowly forcing her way through heavy ice. Before long, we had passed our last barrier and were steaming in the open sea. Captain Coffin reported that when he started, the chances were slim, but as the ship advanced, the ice seemed to slacken and open.<sup>47</sup>

It may have been that while Fiala, a very religious man, was leading the service below deck, Coffin had made his side trip to Coburg, leaving Fiala unaware of what he found. After the brief detour, he headed north coming into clear water. They steamed past Cape Auk, south of Teplitz, and

<sup>46</sup> An undated clipping from the *Boston Sunday Herald* before they left New York states that the sledge teams would be carried by steamer north from Teplitz until they ran into solid ice. There they would be put on the ice to begin their trek to the North Pole.

<sup>47</sup> Fiala, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> Safety Harbor seems to be his name for it. The map shows it as De Long Bay.

headed close in at Fiala's bidding to see if there was any sign of the cache the Baldwin expedition had left in 1902. The cache markers were spotted and immediately Coffin swung north. Soon, under a midnight sun, they were off Teplitz Bay.

It was midnight, August 31, 1903. Captain Coffin had kept his promise to Mr. Ziegler: he had brought the expedition safely to Teplitz Bay, the most northern harbor in Franz Josef Land. He described the arrival:

Arrived here, Lat. 81 47 40, at 11:30 p.m. Hoisted the American flag and blew the whistle. As there would nothing be done until after Breakfast, I kept the ship going North and made 26 miles.

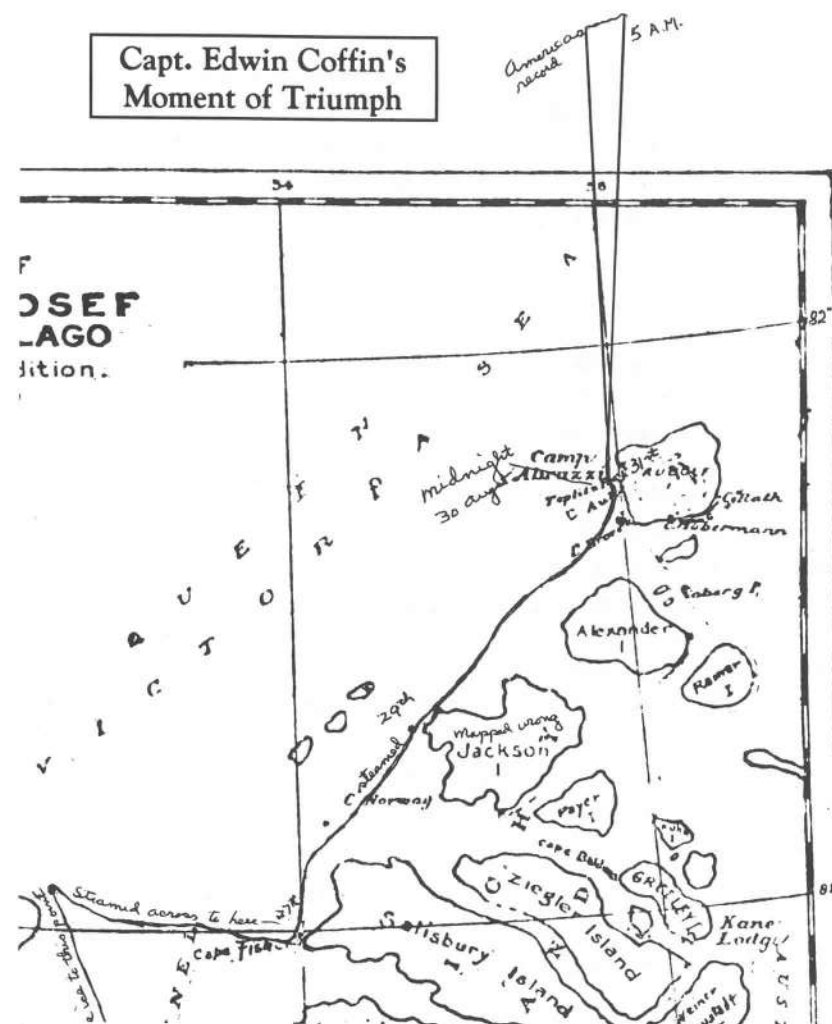
We don't know whether or not Fiala was on deck when they passed Teplitz. In his entry above, Coffin made no mention of him. In a later entry, Coffin wrote that he had told Fiala he would keep going north and return to Teplitz in the morning. That conversation may have taken place earlier, after the religious services, and Fiala, anxious to be rested for the landing at Teplitz, may have gone to bed. Here's how Coffin's later entry described it:

At 11:50 Midnight arrived at Teplitz Bay. Made no stop. Told Mr. Fiala I would go north far as the ice would permit for a record, as 'twas too late to commence to land any stores and I would be back and tied up before any of his party would be stirring. Steamed to 82 degrees 13 minutes 50 seconds north & came back the last 6 miles through three-inch young ice. Arriving and making the steamer fast to the ice at 6:45 with the engine room pretty warm as we were under a strong Jingle from the start and never rung off until I shoved over the indicator to slow at the ice.

In a third version, published in a Seattle newspaper a year or more after they had returned to the States, Coffin said he had continued to steam north without waking Mr. Ziegler (obviously a reporting error as Ziegler was not on board):

When we reached Teplitz Bay, Rudolph Island, it was midnight or a little thereafter, and I continued our course north as far as 82 degrees 35 minutes,<sup>48</sup> without arousing Mr. Ziegler. Then having carried out my contract, I put back to . . . Teplitz Bay.

Passing Teplitz Bay, Coffin opened the throttle wide and at top speed, the *America* steamed 26 miles north of Rudolph Island before coming up on heavy ice fields. He had broken the record (or so he believed). The *America* had reached almost 82 degrees 14 minutes North latitude. He



Coffin drew the course the steamer had taken in Franz Josef Land. He had to go into the margin to show the "farthestest" northern point. See map, back cover.

boasted of it in his notes for Ziegler:

I did all I agreed to do when in your presence & did make a record with the *America* of the farthest [sic] North in this part of the country: 82 -- 14 North.<sup>49</sup>

That record latitude, it turned out, was the "fartherest

<sup>49</sup> Captain Cagni of the Abruzzi Expedition claimed to have steamed to 82 degrees 32 minutes in 1900, which is probably why Coffin much later told the Seattle newspaper what he did. All such claims must be questioned. Nobody is watching over the captain's shoulder when he shoots the sun. The claims of Peary and Cook have been disputed by experts because of this. Nobody will ever know whether or not they did reach the North Pole as claimed.



North" the Fiala-Ziegler Polar Expedition ever got. The North Pole was still 500 miles away, but the expedition never got any closer than Coffin carried them in his steamer in the early morning hours of August 31, 1903. Unhappily, it seems that only the ship's crew was aware of the accomplishment. Everyone else was asleep below decks, enjoying a few hours of smooth going through calm water under the midnight sun.

Even Commander Fiala seems to have been sleeping. In his book, he doesn't mention Coffin's record. He dismisses the trip casually, giving so few details that it seems certain he was not on deck when the record was broken:

Teplitz Bay was passed in the sunlight. . . Open water extending farther north, we steamed on toward the midnight sun. . . Early in the morning of August 31st, we made our highest north, the open Victoria Sea allowing us to pass beyond the 82nd degree of latitude.<sup>50</sup>

Although he did not credit Coffin with setting a record for steamers in the Arctic, Fiala did draw on his diary entry for the day to record a comment by the captain:

On passing Teplitz Bay, Captain Coffin told me the good news that as far as he could see Teplitz Bay would be safe as winter quarters for the ship.<sup>51</sup>

There is nothing in Coffin's voluminous writings in our archives to support that diary entry by Fiala. Coffin never favored Teplitz Bay. Fiala does state in his book that a day or two later Coffin did tell him Teplitz Bay was not a safe winter harbor. But whether he said the opposite, steaming past Teplitz, as Fiala claims, is unknown. The captain, in his moment of triumph, might have said anything. His adrenaline was running; he had brought the expedition safely to its camp site, as pledged to Ziegler. Now, under a glorious midnight sun, he was steaming at full throttle north to set a record. He was a happy man for the first time in weeks:

I could have gone much farther north by going to the East a few miles. As we did not come to make any northern record with the steamer, I turned back. Judging by the way it looked, there is no doubt in my mind but what I could have steamed to 83 [degrees North] all right. 'Twas late in the season and I had the whole cargo to put on ~~shore~~ [shore crossed out] the bay ice and thence to the shore 1 mile, so did not attempt any farther North [than] 82 - 14.

Arrived at Teplitz Bay at 6 a.m. and made fast, starboard side to the

ice, & then commenced preparations for landing the cargo after the seven o'clock breakfast. I found this no place to winter any vessel, it lying entirely open and exposed from the south to WNW. So proceeded to land the cargo and get into winter quarters near Coburg Island 7 miles south of this Island. Everybody well (also the animals) and all glad to get to destination, none more, however, than your humble servant.<sup>52</sup>

And so, in a masterpiece of subdued bliss, Coffin records his accomplishment -- a substantial one by any standard, given the ice conditions. But in an entry written in anger later, Coffin was so upset about events that followed their arrival at Teplitz, he "officially" signed his name to it:

This ends, or ought to end, the voyage north with [the *America*] going into winter quarters at Coburg Island. But owing to a change which compelled the steamer to remain at the edge of the ice at Teplitz Bay and get blown away the latter part of October, [it was] two days before I could get back with the loss of 70 fathoms chain and big anchor, winding up the voyage by losing the steamer. And so ended all the Polar expedition too. Got back, but did not get ahead any. E. Coffin. (Elmwood, p. 57)

Commander Fiala did not seem to share Coffin's euphoria when the *America* pulled into Teplitz Bay. He's so busy describing the polar bears that welcomed them that he fails to credit the captain with transporting them there:

We returned to Teplitz Bay by six o'clock in the morning of a beautiful sunlit day, a female bear and her cub paying us a visit as we made fast alongside the heavy bay ice. Several of the men opened fire from the deck of the *America*, but I was glad to see the mother and her cub escape unhurt.<sup>53</sup>

There surely must have been a few sighs of relief when the *America* tied up to the ice in Teplitz Bay, but there were no cheers. At least none on record. Most of the "ice pilots" who had been criticizing Coffin for so long, were asleep. Coffin and his crew, who had been up all night, made the ship fast and then went below to sleep. Contentedly, no doubt. Later, Coffin went ashore:

I went on shore about 1/2 mile and investigated with many others of the Field Party. I saw that the Bay was full of solid ice which looked as if it had been there some years. Especially in the bight of the Bay. On the outer edge it has been subject to heavy pressures & is pushed up in ridges with the shore ice comparatively smooth. If the wind comes in strong from the West and brings in an ice pack I will have to make a harbor be-

<sup>52</sup> Coffin, loose sheets. This was written after the loss of the steamer. He seems to be stating his wish to have gone to Coburg, not the fact that the steamer remained at Teplitz.

<sup>53</sup> Fiala, p. 37. Later, he shows less sympathy, shooting several bears for food.

<sup>50</sup> Fiala, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

hind Teplitz Island, the nearest point close to Coburg Island.<sup>54</sup>

Commander Fiala issued General Orders No. 15 on September 6, 1903, a week after their arrival. He printed it in full in his book. In the second of four paragraphs, he gives Captain Coffin the credit due him:

1. Teplitz Bay is to be our winter headquarters, and in honour of the courageous men of Italy and their famous leader who occupied this site before us, we shall name our winter quarters "Camp Abruzzi."
2. We have reached this northern point after many difficulties and trials in a particularly bad season of much ice -- and great credit is due to Captain Coffin and Officers and crew of the *America* for the record she now holds. . . .

Signed, ANTHONY FIALA  
Commanding Ziegler Polar Expedition.

That is the only compliment the Edgartown captain receives in Fiala's book. His almost total failure to acknowledge Coffin's dedication and seamanship is evidence of the coldness of the relationship.<sup>55</sup>

The two men had frequently differed during the long voyage, but their most serious dispute came immediately after arriving at Teplitz. It was over the important matter of the steamer's winter berth. Fiala admits that three days after their arrival at Teplitz, Coffin told him it was unsuitable:

[Captain Coffin] told me on September 3d that he would be obliged to take the *America* away and look for other winter quarters, and that he would not be responsible for her safety if she was allowed to remain in Teplitz Bay.<sup>56</sup>

The next day Coffin put his opinion in writing in a letter to Fiala. He wanted the record to be clear. Fiala did not quote the letter in his book, but we know what it said because the captain summarized it in his notes:

Teplitz Bay, Sept. 4, 1903

Mr. Anthony Fiala  
Commanding Ziegler Polar Expedition  
Dear Sir:

I hereby certify that Teplitz Bay is full of heavy pack ice Running across it E. & West with a small shelter on the east side.

<sup>54</sup> It isn't clear what he means. There is no Teplitz Island, only Teplitz Bay on Rudolph Island. Coburg Island remains his favorite wintering spot.

<sup>55</sup> It was not only Fiala who neglected Coffin. William S. Champ, Ziegler's secretary, wrote the introduction to the book and included a long paragraph praising Capt. J. Kjeldsen of Norway, skipper of the vessel that rescued the expedition. Not a word about Coffin.

<sup>56</sup> Fiala, p. 42.

I do not consider it any shelter from the Pack ice coming in (in the fall) with SS West to NNWest winds.

South of the island about 8 miles looks better.

Before going to see it, cannot be certain.

Wintering off Teplitz Bay, I will accept no responsibility as regards the safety of the ship or any cargo that remains in her.

E. Coffin, Master of Steamer *America*

P.S. Teplitz Bay is well protected from all other points Eastly.

At the bottom of his summary, Coffin, to make the record clear, added:

Letter received [by] Mr. Fiala Sept. 6th 1903. (Elmwood)

But Fiala would not change his mind, listing his reasons in a letter to Coffin. Again, no copy of this letter is in Fiala's book. These extracts are in Coffin's notes:

'Twas a necessity to have the steamer winter at Teplitz Bay.

Loss of the steamer would not affect the salaries of the officers or crew.

I [Coffin] would be responsible for the success of the expedition if I took the steamer away from Teplitz Bay.

In his book, Fiala lists his reasons for insisting that the steamer remain at Teplitz:

To send the *America* away with her crew, I would have been obliged to equip the entire ship's company with sleeping bags, dogs, and sledges -- for there was the possibility of the ship's loss no matter where she might be taken in the Archipelago. Then there were the added disadvantages of a divided party, the loss to the expedition of the services of the crew, and also the sacrifice of such facilities as were afforded by the workshop aboard the *America*. There was only one other thing to do and that was to add the shore party to the crews, take everything -- ponies, dogs, large tents, lumber, food, equipment and stores, and look for other winter quarters.

But the season was far advanced and by going farther south we would have lost the decided advantage of a high [northern] base for the sledge party. After considering both sides of the question I explained to the members of the Field Department the nature of the risk we assumed by remaining in Teplitz Bay and then gave orders to Captain Coffin to winter the ship in that neighbourhood.

It was a decision that Commander Anthony Fiala would soon regret.

(To be continued.)

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is grateful to a number of persons who helped with his research. Among them are Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Ambrose, Ms. Danguole Budris of the Edgartown Library, librarians at the Falmouth Public Library, Genealogist Catherine Merwin Mayhew of the Society and the author's son, Prof. Stephen Railton of the University of Virginia.

## Holmes Hole Welcomes the Bartletts

by JOAN DRUETT

*Joan Druett, whose latest book, *Hen Frigates*, has just been published by Simon & Schuster, has extensively researched the lives and journals of women, usually captains' wives, who went to sea. During her research she discovered the story of Mrs. Bartlett's two visits to Holmes Hole in the mid-1800s. The journal is owned by Everett White of White Cove, Maine, and we are grateful to him for allowing us to publish these extracts.*

MARY ELLEN Bartlett was 30 years old in 1860 when she began her seafaring career aboard her husband's brig, *Atlantic Union*. The brig was not a large and commodious vessel, but she regularly plied the North Atlantic in waters hazardous and unpleasant, especially in winter.

Capt. James Brooks Bartlett, owner and skipper, ran his shipping business on a shoestring, hauling cargo between the British Isles and the United States. His young wife often did duty as one of the crew, most often in the galley.

Food was a preoccupation on board. Captain Bartlett had no surplus funds to stock the pantry bountifully. Rarely was there enough to eat. As one would expect, the North Atlantic was often so rough they had to "eat off the floor," as Mary Ellen wrote. En route to Texas in 1860, she noted,

I expect this is Thanksgiving day at home. Well, we haven't much for a Thanksgiving dinner. Most of our rarities are gone, but the Cook is making some green apple pies.

The cook was not only a poor cook, he was also a poor housekeeper.

Couldn't eat any breakfast or dinner, there was so much dirt in the food. Our Cook is poor enough at the best [and] has not been well lately and I don't know but we shall all starve.

Mary Ellen was not joking. Food was never abundant aboard the brig. For a treat on an 1860 voyage from Texas to Boston, Captain Bartlett bought "a pair of chickens in Galveston but one flew overboard." The other, despite an effort to fatten her on table scraps, remained "nothing but skin

JOAN DRUETT of New Zealand, an occasional contributor to this journal, is in the States on a book tour for her book, *Hen Frigates*, which has received laudatory reviews in the press.

August 1998

MOMENTS IN HISTORY 43

and bones." In the cold weather and rough seas, they sailed north without even one good roast to sustain their spirits. Then, with an obvious sigh of relief, Mary Ellen wrote on February 22, 1861:

Here we are at anchor in Holmes Hole.

A welcome haven it was. The sea had been so rough and the wind so cold that the brig was coated with ice when she came to anchor. The next day was no better:

Noon still blows hard and Oh so cold! Don't know but I shall freeze here over the cabin stove.

Then two days later, the wind changed and on the 26th of February they dropped anchor at their destination, Boston harbor,

... and how thankful should we be for all God's goodness to us.

There was a second time when she was grateful to find a safe haven in Holmes Hole. In January 1863, the brig was again sailing north to Boston, again in a storm:

Still stormy. We have passed Montauk and are going into Greenport for a harbor, much more pleasant than being tossed about by the stormy billow.

As usual, food was scarce. Safely anchored, Captain Bartlett took four men on shore to dig some clams. No luck.

The lighthouse keeper told them there were none ... [so] James got some eggs and butter and the keeper's wife sent us some apples.

The following day, what a comfort it must have been to sail into friendly Holmes Hole. Soon after they arrived, a boat came alongside and we got some clams and milk and apples.

This was fortunate for that night a snow storm raged. When the family awakened (their young son Willie was on board, adding to Mary Ellen's concerns), they found the cabin windows darkened by the snow which had drifted against them. ... calm and very pleasant [now]. ... James thinks the wind will breeze up by and by. He has gone ashore. ... friendly locals had called on board with an invitation to visit.

That is where her journal ends. Somehow, we are confident that the "friendly locals" of Holmes Hole did not let the Bartletts starve and that their welcome lasted as long as the contrary wind and tide.

Joan Druett's *Hen Frigates: Wives of Merchant Captains Under Sail*, can be purchased at the Society shop. It's a fascinating tale of women in the masculine world of merchant vessels in the 1800s.



## A Running Account Of Matters & Things

by HENRY BAYLIES

**H**ENRY and Hattie, his ailing wife, are still in Mobile, Alabama, where he seeks a teaching position. They have come south for her health. She is suffering from some unknown ailment -- the latest diagnosis being neuralgia. However, it would seem to be much more serious than that.

For new readers a quick review: Henry, the son of Frederick Baylies Jr., builder of Edgartown's four Protestant church buildings and a shopkeeper on Main Street, is an ordained Methodist minister who has given up preaching because of a throat ailment. He is now an educator, having been the principal of Dukes County Academy and Edgartown's first high school. He is 28 and Hattie is 25. His first wife, Hannah, died of consumption in 1848, only a year after they were married.

Resuming his diary, we complete an entry that began in the previous issue.

**Monday, Dec. 30, 1850.** [Continued] I attended [mass] in the P.M. at the Catholic Cathedral. During the hour I spent there, the Bishop with his attendants were constantly chanting in Latin & at the same time going through certain rites & ceremonies which were quite unintelligible to me.

Saturday morning I listened to a discourse from Bro. Milburn on "The Christian Idolatry & Devil Worship." His text was from the temptation of the Savior. "Whatever he may have proved or shown then there was little

such food as would satisfy a hungry famishing soul."

In the evening at 7 o'clock I was to have delivered myself of a missionary address at the Franklin St. Church. The evening was dark & the rain fell in torrents so that the addresses were postponed & Bro. Hamilton preached a practical discourse on Trust in Providence, Text: 106 Ps., 150. I believe I shall at length get it preached into me that I must have more faith in God. God grant me faith to triumph over all my enemies, for Christ Sake.<sup>1</sup>

Called this afternoon in company with Bro. Hamilton to meet a committee of physicians appointed to investigate the question of medical etiquette pending between Drs. Hicklin & Wolkey. It seems Dr. H. has charged Dr. W. with gross impropriety in the case of Mrs. Baylies in prescribing for her without his (Dr. H.'s) consent, etc. It is evidently a case of misunderstanding between them, heightened by previous jealousy on the part of Dr. Hicklin. Folly in high or would-be high places.

We have had today a very cold rain. The mercury this forenoon was at 37 degrees. Previous to this rain there was every indication of snow & at the North we should have had a heavy fall of snow.

**1850 is no more!!**

**1851**

**Wednesday, January 1st.** This has been a very unpleasant introduction to the new year. The cold, winter rain which had prevailed during the past several days has continued today. There was a temporary holding up last evening to afford opportunity for the

<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising that Henry's faith is being shaken. He is being sorely tested, it would seem.

August 1998

DOCUMENTS 45

display of the Unique Societies & for the small assembling at the Watch Meeting. These Unique Societies are peculiar I believe to Mobile & perhaps N. Orleans. There are several of the Societies, as the "Cowbellions," "Strikers," "Invincibles," "Rising Generation," or "Calfbellions," & perhaps others. These Societies are perfectly secret. No one outside knows their members, where they meet & what is their object. Once a year -- on New Year's eve they suddenly appear in the streets dressed in peculiar style with banners & music. Many of their costumes are very costly. One of the Societies last year represented every kind of beast & bird & fish it is said, each person representing a different kind stood in a small cart or waggon drawn by a slave. In their dress last night the Cowbellions represented the dress of almost every age -- the Roman, the ---<sup>2</sup> the Revolutionary, the Chinese, etc. Two of them were supplied with huge imitations of horns & tails. It is said this society is composed of many of the finest citizens & has been organized 20 years. The other Societies are imitations of later origin. All appear out between the hours of 9 & 12. At 12 midnight the Cowbellions are accustomed to call at the Mayor's residence & partake of refreshments which he is expected to provide.

So far as I can judge from what I saw & learn, their demonstrations are demonstrations of full grown, consummate folly.

At 9 o'clock last night I was at the Franklin St. Ch. of Bro. Hamilton's at Watch meeting on engagement to preach. By some delay I did not com-

mence my sermon till 10 m. of 10 & concluded at 17 m. of 11, making 53 minutes. I had some freedom in speaking notwithstanding my long suspension of ministerial duty. Had I studied my sermon more thoroughly I need not have preached so long by 15 minutes. I had scarcely begun when my throat began to husk up & became very sensitive & sore. By pretty free use of cold water however I succeeded in filling up the time. Last night & early this morning my throat was very bad & it is now quite sensitive. I am however encouraged to hope for restoration. My text was Acts 16-20. . . . The discourse was very applicable to my own state & did me some good I trust whatever its effect may be on the hearers. I feel the need of preaching in order to increase spiritually. In consequence of dearest Hattie's sickness I was obliged to return home at the conclusion of the discourse.

This P.M., Bro. Hamilton left for Conference & appointed me to preach for him Sabbath morning & make the missionary speech Sab. night. Nous nervous.<sup>3</sup>

Hattie seems improving so far as Neuralgia pains are concerned. The least fault in diet is followed by severe attacks like cholera morbus which very much reduce her strength. She had an attack this morning.

Business Prospects are still dark. Nothing yet offers.

Reflections on the past year would be in order in this day's record but must be postponed till some convenient season. It is now full time I was in bed & asleep.

P.S. While I was preaching last

<sup>2</sup> In these days Henry's handwriting has become even more difficult to decipher.

<sup>3</sup> Here again, his writing is illegible. Although the verb is missing, he must mean "we're nervous."

night a shooting match was going on just under the church windows. It appears that a male slave in the family opposite wished to marry a female slave in the same family. She was opposed to the proposition & the boy became exceedingly enraged. Their master was at length obliged to sell the "boy" & did sell him to Slatter the notable slave dealer as a dining room servant.

On New Year's evening the boy, knowing that the master was away from home, went up armed with his pistol & challenged the girl to show her head out of the window & fired his pistol. He shot several random shots, which quite distracted me in my preaching, then the father of the girl took down his master's gun & fired at the "boy." The "boy" shrieked & ran & I am told will die of his wounds. This is I believe the third or fourth murder within the month I have been here.

**Monday, Jan'y 6.** First a few things about the past & then, when today shall have passed, the present.

Wednesday I met with several of the preachers on their way to Conference & likewise with Bp. [Bishop] Copers. The Bp. appeared in good health & spirits. The conversation was for the moment on his ---- [?] passage from N. Orleans to this city & the course to be pursued in reaching Conf. The Bp. is a short, very corpulent, hollow-chested man, of homely address, deep-set dark eyes. His dress was very neat. Straight collared frock coat & vest & a ---- [?] like hat. His head I did not see. I recollected on seeing the Dr., that I heard him preach at Duane St. church, N. York, at the last General Conf. in N. York of the M. E.

C. before [the] North-South was ---- [divided?].

Saturday evening, Judge John Edward Jones, a local preacher in our Church . . . called on me<sup>4</sup>. . . [he] gave us some account of Southern Country Life -- log cabins, shutter windows, free ventilation, etc., etc. During conversation, we were each led to items of personal history. He appeared to sympathize very strongly with our afflictions & proposed to befriend us in a certain way, i.e., by making known in part our circumstances to some of the wealthy brethren & finding a home among them for us. His family resides some 25 miles out of the city or he would take us into his own family. I objected to his doing so, but he urged the propriety of his course from the consideration I am a preacher who has given all my time & health to the church & they, the ch., are bound to provide for us, etc. I however left the matter to his discretion.

Sabbath (yesterday) morning I preached to a very respectable audience at Franklin St. M.E.C. (Dr. Hamilton's). I expected a very small congregation since Dr. Nealy was to preach at St. Francis St. Church (Br. Milburn's), but was happily disappointed. My text was "Grace the light of the world." My subject "Living Christianity, the Light of the World." I spoke about forty minutes with great freedom to as an attentive congregation as I ever addressed. I was obliged to resort to water only once during my speaking & at the conclusion felt my throat less affected by far than I expected. I smoked a cigar a few mo-

<sup>4</sup> The visitor told a long tale about a minister who had a total loss of memory.

ments before preaching & after, but whether that was any benefit I know not yet.<sup>5</sup> I today barely experience scarcely any unpleasant sensation in my throat. I feel much encouraged to hope I may be able yet to preach regularly.

In the Eve I listened to an ordinary discourse from Rev. Br. Galespie who last year preached at St. Francis St. Ch. in this city.

Friday, Saturday & Sabbath were delightful days. Frid. went a couple of miles out of the city with Underwood.<sup>6</sup> He had the precaution to take an umbrella & we really found it a comfortable shelter from the Sun before we returned, notwithstanding it was the 3rd of January. This morning it is mild but rather cloudy & threatening rain.

Hattie's health has been very much affected by the changes. She has had spasms at night for several days & suffers much from pain in her bowels. Her feet have been again rather painful but today are better.

Have not yet heard one word from my correspondent expectants for employment. . .

**Saturday, Jan'y 11.** The last week has past [sic] on the whole rather pleasantly . . . The weather has been generally unpleasantly wet yet warm. Overcoats have been quite unnecessary & at times thin coats comfortable.

Business prospect have opened & closed without changing my circumstances. Mr. Merrill of the Boston Academy has lost his Mr. Richards. He proposed to Mrs. Merrill of the Female Department either to take Mr. Smith,

<sup>5</sup> Henry would be astonished at the things we know about smoking today.

<sup>6</sup> Underwood is Henry's college classmate who has, like Hattie, come to Mobile for his health.

who was assisting half the time in each school, or to let him have him. In case Mrs. M. of the Female took him it would have a place for me, otherwise not. It turned out not of course. My friend Underwood however got a place to assist Mrs. M. two hours a day.

A place is vacant up 20 miles from Gainesville [?] which will pay perhaps at most \$1300, probably \$1100, a year from which between \$800 & \$900 expenses must be deducted. Moreover it is a small, partly log-cabin settlement of some eleven families situated on a knoll or ridge in the midst of a prairie 20 miles from any where. It would cost me some \$20 to procure this place & I should have to be absent from Hattie at least a week & then should I get the place H. would have to ride 20 miles over a horrible road. The want of social & religious privileges, the disadvantage of the location, the impracticability of my leaving H. so long & her traveling the road, together with the actually small nett profit concluded me to let the chance slide.

On Wednesday Evening I had the pleasure of marrying a Miss Clark to Mr. Goff for which I pocketed a [?].<sup>7</sup> Very opportune. After marriage service, which took place about 7 o'clock, I repaired to the Vestry of Franklin St. M.E.C. & preached a sermon of 55 minutes from text, "Trust you therefore who believe he is precious." I had but few moments notice of my preaching & so took this as most familiar text. I find that the impression is I am left by Bro. Hamilton in charge of the church during his absence at Conference. I do not understand it so & yet I am required to meet the expectation. I am expected to preach tomorrow or get

<sup>7</sup> He doesn't tell us how much he was paid.



the pulpit supplied & consequently to be prepared to preach once & if able twice. I do not feel easy under this arrangement.

Speaking of the division of the church, North & South, Bro. McCoy, a local preacher of excellent repute, reflected severely on the Northern preachers. Further, he said, formerly when a Northern preacher came South he was treated like a prince & the same of Southern preachers going North, but now if a Northern preacher comes among us he is looked coldly upon; he feels chilled, etc. I believe this strictly true. I have felt this chilling influence since I came to Mobile.

Well, I will bear up under it & while I remain here will do what I can for the spiritual good of those with whom I associate.

I have received no letter from any quarter. I mailed a letter yesterday to Parents & inclosed one to my Cousins. This noon I went to the P. Office to attend the sale of a Negro woman & child, but was disappointed as they had been disposed of at a private sale. About 4 1/2 o'clock this P.M., a man walked a tight wire a distance of about 400 feet at a height of perhaps 30 ft. descending to 10 ft. The crowd was immense all around & in the Public Square & witnessed the astonishing feete [sic] with acclamation.

Hattie's health the past week has been better & improving. Last Mond. or Tues. morning, Dr. Wolkey introduced one of his suppositors with no pain or inconvenience. Since then H. has been comparatively free from pain & has gained in strength. She has several times walked around the room by steadying herself by the wall. . . I have now great encouragement that she will be well. This is cheering. Strange that

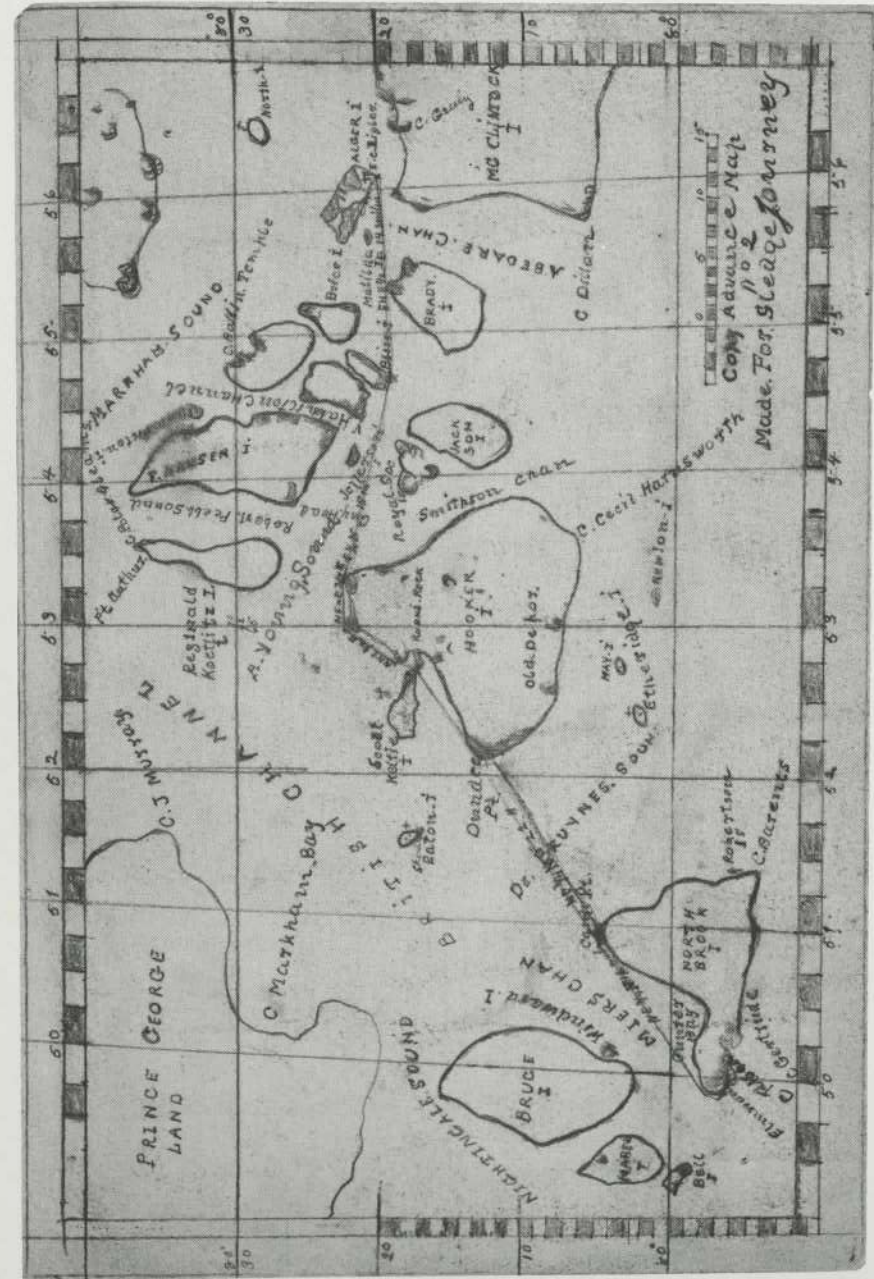
Physicians at the North had not suspected the cause of her neuralgia & attempted a cure. . .

Monday, Jan'y 13. Yesterday & today have passed as very pleasant days. Yesterday morning at 11 o'clock I had a large & very attentive congregation at Franklin St. Church. My subject was Christian Zeal from text "It is good to be zealously affected, always in a good thing." [?] I spoke about 55 minutes to as attentive & interested a congregation as I ever addressed. It was encouraging to see many leaning forward listening with rivetted attention & others bathed in tears. I thought the discourse took effect & pray that it may stir them up to holy Christian Zeal. Bro. McCoy consented to preach at night. I have been anxious since here to listen to preachers other than our own. Last eve heard Dr. W. T. Hamilton of the Presbyterian Church. Dr. H. preached a very simple plain discourse from text, "They hated me without a cause" in which he showed that Sinners at the present day hate Christ without cause. I judge from what I have heard this was rather different from his ordinary discourses -- less figuration & imagination.

Nothing particular has occurred today. Rec'd a paper from Folks -- the Gazette, from which learn the death of Alex. P. Weeks Jr., in Providence in his 20th year.

Harriette has been gradually gaining the week past & I am as yet greatly encouraged to hope. The Dr. thinks her flesh gaining & this evening gave her a tonic. My own throat suffered somewhat from preaching. . . I have great occasion for gratitude that I can preach with so little suffering.

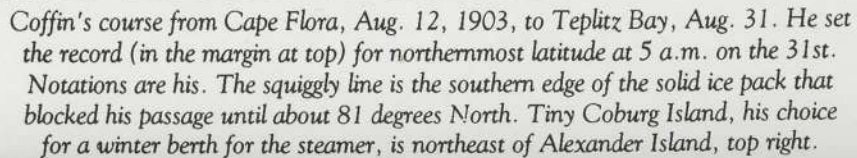
(To be continued)



*Crude map made in April 1905 at Elmwood camp to guide a sledge party to Camp Ziegler on Alger Island to recover food from cache left by the 1901 Baldwin party. The story of this sledge trip will be told in a future issue.*



From the Edwin Coffin Collection at the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society.



Coffin's course from Cape Flora, Aug. 12, 1903, to Teplitz Bay, Aug. 31. He set the record (in the margin at top) for northernmost latitude at 5 a.m. on the 31st. Notations are his. The squiggly line is the southern edge of the solid ice pack that blocked his passage until about 81 degrees North. Tiny Coburg Island, his choice for a winter berth for the steamer, is northeast of Alexander Island, top right.